



# Washington State Fusion Center INFOCUS



TUESDAY — 22 FEB 2022

	International	National	Regional and Local
<b>Events, Opportunities</b> <a href="#">Go to articles</a>	<a href="#">02/22 Russia paying hefty financial price</a> <a href="#">02/22 Germany suspends Nord Stream 2 pipeline</a> <a href="#">02/22 UK barrage of sanctions to hit Russia hard</a> <a href="#">02/22 US offers limited initial response to Russia</a> <a href="#">02/22 Ukraine: borders 'will remain unchangeable'</a> <a href="#">02/22 UK inflation hits 30yr-high; sharp but short?</a> <a href="#">02/22 New Zealand police, protesters clash</a> <a href="#">02/21 Putin hints at wider military aims</a> <a href="#">02/21 Putin orders troops to eastern Ukraine</a> <a href="#">02/21 Ukraine: urgent EU sanctions on Russia</a> <a href="#">02/21 Ukraine 'attacks' by Russia 'fake factory'</a> <a href="#">02/21 Ukraine neighbors bracing; refugee influx</a> <a href="#">02/21 Rebel-controlled territories eastern Ukraine</a> <a href="#">02/21 US letter to UN: Russia has Ukraine 'kill list'</a> <a href="#">02/21 England eases all coronavirus rules</a> <a href="#">02/21 Australia reopens international borders</a> <a href="#">02/21 US nears return Iran nuclear deal</a> <a href="#">02/21 Inflation starts to show up in Asia</a> <a href="#">02/21 Canada extends emergency powers</a> <a href="#">02/21 Australia: China warship laser incident</a> <a href="#">02/21 Credit Suisse leak: Arab rulers, spy chiefs</a> <a href="#">02/21 Guarding India's forests: little pay, high risk</a> <a href="#">02/21 German officials condemn climate protests</a> <a href="#">02/21 Northern Europe struck by 3rd major storm</a> <a href="#">02/20 Blitzkrieg or minor incursion?</a> <a href="#">02/20 Russia seeking pretext to invade?</a> <a href="#">02/20 War hinges on 2 separatist enclaves?</a> <a href="#">02/20 US: all signs suggest Russia invasion</a> <a href="#">02/20 Ukraine leader: dangers of appeasement</a> <a href="#">02/20 Belarus: Russia troops remain indefinitely</a> <a href="#">02/20 Russia extends military drills near Ukraine</a> <a href="#">02/20 Behind China stance, desire protect US ties</a> <a href="#">02/20 Police continuing to clear Ottawa protesters</a> <a href="#">02/20 How Covid changed medicine for the future</a> <a href="#">02/20 Final medal count Winter Olympics</a> <a href="#">02/19 Russia test-launches ballistic missiles</a> <a href="#">02/19 Russia proxies in Ukraine: arms call-up</a> <a href="#">02/19 Ukraine rebels: full military mobilization</a> <a href="#">02/19 Ukraine-Russia crisis: tension grinds on</a> <a href="#">02/19 West to arm resistance if Russia invades?</a> <a href="#">02/19 G7: de-escalate; costly invasion sanctions</a> <a href="#">02/19 Ministry: Cuba to deepen ties with Russia</a> <a href="#">02/19 Western Europe cleanup after deadly storm</a> <a href="#">02/18 NATO raises readiness level of troops</a> <a href="#">02/18 Ottawa police tow trucks, arrest protesters</a> <a href="#">02/18 US halts aid Burkina Faso; military coup</a> <a href="#">02/18 Brazil mudslides: neglect, climate change</a>	<a href="#">02/21 US wrestles: did Russia officially 'invade'?</a> <a href="#">02/21 Mostly unvaccinated dying from Covid</a> <a href="#">02/21 Wary: fast-moving offshoot of omicron</a> <a href="#">02/21 Covid itself a risk factor for heart disease</a> <a href="#">02/21 Study debunks need Covid deep cleaning</a> <a href="#">02/21 Studies: 4th shot not needed perhaps years</a> <a href="#">02/21 Immigration courts struggle: backlog crisis</a> <a href="#">02/21 Import surge is skipping the train</a> <a href="#">02/21 Houses of worship face clergy shortage</a> <a href="#">02/21 Frackers push into once-dead shale areas</a> <a href="#">02/21 China sanctions 2 US defense contractors</a> <a href="#">02/21 Trucker convoys to shutter Capital beltway</a> <a href="#">02/21 Black farmers fear foreclosure; relief frozen</a> <a href="#">02/20 National pandemic emergency extended</a> <a href="#">02/20 Growing cohort never worked from office</a> <a href="#">02/20 New Mexico National Guard in classrooms</a> <a href="#">02/20 CDC not publishing all Covid data collected</a> <a href="#">02/20 Capitol fencing ahead State Union address</a> <a href="#">02/20 Group took down Keystone; now missteps</a> <a href="#">02/20 Buying condos just got more complicated</a> <a href="#">02/20 San Francisco mayor: city failed kids</a> <a href="#">02/20 American self-censorship—for China</a> <a href="#">02/20 Millions face polar plunge this week</a> <a href="#">02/19 How long Covid exhausts the body</a> <a href="#">02/19 FDA eyes second Covid-19 booster shot</a> <a href="#">02/19 Experts caution cannot treat as endemic</a> <a href="#">02/19 Fury over Covid rules erupts in rural Calif.</a> <a href="#">02/19 Sticker shock: 80% car buyers above MSRP</a> <a href="#">02/19 Toxic culture DIA defense attaché system?</a> <a href="#">02/19 Bird flu found at 4th Indiana turkey farm</a> <a href="#">02/18 Virus deaths modest decline; surge wanes</a> <a href="#">02/18 Covid raises risk of mental health disorders</a> <a href="#">02/18 NYC targets homeless from subway nights</a> <a href="#">02/18 US power grid increasingly unreliable</a> <a href="#">02/18 US lifts Mexico avocado ban</a>	<a href="#">02/21 Retroactive decertification police officers</a> <a href="#">02/21 Seattle PD struggles to hire new officers</a> <a href="#">02/21 Spokane Co. sheriff fires deputy 'for lying'</a> <a href="#">02/21 Transit buses idled: supply chain, staffing</a> <a href="#">02/21 Concern: kids abandoned in hospitals ERs</a> <a href="#">02/21 Snow knocks power parts of western Wash.</a> <a href="#">02/20 OR, WA doctors 'cautiously optimistic'</a> <a href="#">02/20 West Seattle Bridge reopening delayed</a> <a href="#">02/20 Next affordable city already too expensive</a> <a href="#">02/20 Hundreds still reeling Whatcom Co. floods</a> <a href="#">02/20 Homeless stall clearing near Seattle city hall</a> <a href="#">02/20 Psychiatric boarding: windowless ER room</a> <a href="#">02/20 Protests closed Blaine border crossing 8hrs</a> <a href="#">02/19 Weyerhaeuser return downtown Seattle</a> <a href="#">02/19 Bellevue boom echoes around the region</a> <a href="#">02/19 'Stand w/Ukraine rally' held at Space Needle</a> <a href="#">02/18 Bike helmet rule dropped: racial justice</a> <a href="#">02/18 Deaths pile up Pierce Co. highways; why?</a> <a href="#">02/18 Judge limits Teamsters concrete picketing</a> <a href="#">02/18 Mayor, police chief quiet over deleted texts</a>
<b>Cyber Awareness</b> <a href="#">Go to articles</a>	<a href="#">02/22 New banking trojans detected: 97,000</a> <a href="#">02/21 Mobile malware evolution 2021</a> <a href="#">02/21 Open source appeal for cyber crooks</a> <a href="#">02/21 Xenomorph banking trojan targets Europe</a> <a href="#">02/21 Israel probe: no police abuse spyware case</a> <a href="#">02/21 Revamped CryptBot: pirated software sites</a> <a href="#">02/19 OpenSea high-value NFTs stolen, sold</a> <a href="#">02/18 Spyware stifling human rights in Bahrain?</a> <a href="#">02/18 Conti ransomware gang takes over TrickBot</a>	<a href="#">02/21 DC Metro social media hacked</a> <a href="#">02/21 Cookware giant Meyer discloses attack</a> <a href="#">02/21 Expeditors shuts down after cyberattack</a> <a href="#">02/21 Crypto-scammers new target: dating apps</a> <a href="#">02/21 Payment card skimming reemerges w/twist</a> <a href="#">02/20 At Olympics, cybersecurity worries linger</a> <a href="#">02/19 CISA list: free cybersecurity tools, services</a> <a href="#">02/18 Experts: China outpaces US cyber weapons</a> <a href="#">02/18 Crackdown spyware vendors to escalate?</a> <a href="#">02/18 SIM-swapping attacks at crypto-accounts</a> <a href="#">02/18 Carpet bombing attacks on the rise</a>	
<b>Terror Conditions</b> <a href="#">Go to articles</a>	<a href="#">02/21 Exodus from Syria's one-time IS capital</a> <a href="#">02/20 Offline versus online radicalization</a> <a href="#">02/20 Australia court: bushfires terrorist act?</a> <a href="#">02/20 Taliban seek private sector economic aid</a> <a href="#">02/20 MI5: Afghanistan breeding ground jihadis</a> <a href="#">02/20 Female Afghan judges fled to Australia exile</a>	<a href="#">02/21 Followers join ISIS North America in US</a> <a href="#">02/21 Al-Shabab budgets \$24M/yr. for weapons</a> <a href="#">02/19 DHS: all Afghan evacuees released in US</a> <a href="#">02/18 Pentagon audit: security risk Afghans in US</a>	

	<a href="#">02/19 Somalia restaurant bombing kills 15</a> <a href="#">02/19 IS-linked jihadists kill 40 civilians in Mali</a> <a href="#">02/17 Growth, strategy of ISKP media operations</a>		
<b>Suspicious, Unusual</b> <a href="#">Go to articles</a>	<a href="#">02/21 Journalists group dismayed by Olympics</a> <a href="#">02/20 Olympics close: China's political script</a> <a href="#">02/20 EV batteries burning aboard drifting ship</a> <a href="#">02/19 China saga of a chained woman unfolds</a> <a href="#">02/18 Reckoning: the great greenwashing scam</a>	<a href="#">02/21 Twosday! Numbers like 2-22-22 fascinate</a> <a href="#">02/19 Rodent infestation Family Dollar warehouse</a> <a href="#">02/18 Hostess unveils caffeinated doughnuts</a> <a href="#">02/18 Record number millionaires: 401(k)s, IRAs</a>	<a href="#">02/21 Snowpack Cascades, Olympics in trouble</a> <a href="#">02/19 Plant fossils found in San Juan Islands</a> <a href="#">02/18 King Co. fares well for zombie apocalypse</a>
<b>Crime, Criminals</b> <a href="#">Go to articles</a>	<a href="#">02/19 Epstein pal found hanged in prison cell</a> <a href="#">02/19 Mexico army anti-mine squads to cartel turf</a> <a href="#">02/18 Ecuador's drug violence soars</a> <a href="#">02/18 Thief must repay \$400 in record \$6M heist</a> <a href="#">02/18 Switzerland arrests 'finger cutter' drug lord</a> <a href="#">02/18 RCMP: mob wrecks remote BC pipeline site</a>	<a href="#">02/22 Michigan: 5yr-old executed; 2 adults killed</a> <a href="#">02/21 Maryland: 2 children shot while playing</a> <a href="#">02/21 Colorado: fentanyl in home 5 OD deaths</a> <a href="#">02/20 Guns in self-defense thwart crimes data</a> <a href="#">02/18 Extremist infiltration of military a problem?</a>	<a href="#">02/21 Seattle police: man shot downtown</a> <a href="#">02/21 KCSO: juvenile shot outside library</a> <a href="#">02/21 Renton police: man shot in the back</a> <a href="#">02/21 Seattle police: deadly shooting Capitol Hill</a> <a href="#">02/21 Neighborhood turns to license plate camera</a> <a href="#">02/20 Seattle mobile police precinct Little Saigon</a> <a href="#">02/20 Catalytic converter thieves cash in; low risk</a> <a href="#">02/19 Seattle PD: 4 officers hurt; downtown fights</a> <a href="#">02/19 Renton police investigate shots fired at park</a> <a href="#">02/19 Chehalis: officer injured; suspect killed</a> <a href="#">02/19 Portland shooting: 1 killed, 5 wounded</a> <a href="#">02/19 Portland police: 6 shootings in 9hrs</a>

[DISCLAIMER and FAIR USE Notice](#)

## Events, Opportunities

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	<b>02/22 UK inflation hits 30yr-high; sharp but short?</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/inflation-hits-30-year-high-uk-households-start-buckle-2022-02-22/">https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/inflation-hits-30-year-high-uk-households-start-buckle-2022-02-22/</a>
GIST	<p>ASHFORD, England, Feb 22 (Reuters) - After work in the evenings, Nicola Frape turns off the heating and huddles under a blanket with her daughter and a hot water bottle. Adding a layer costs nothing, she says, but leaving the boiler on drains her inflation-hit bank account.</p> <p>Treats such as cinema tickets have been scrapped as the 38 year-old care worker's food and fuel bills climb, and she has tried to cancel her pay-TV service but cannot get through to her provider: she assumes everyone is doing the same thing.</p> <p>Frape is one of millions of normally financially comfortable Britons who are facing a cost-of-living crisis as a double-whammy of accelerating inflation - driven by soaring energy bills - and tax increases kicks in this year.</p> <p>Fast-rising prices are inflicting what the Bank of England says will be the biggest one-year fall in disposable income, adjusted for inflation, in at least 30 years.</p> <p>After a decade of stagnant living standards - and in stark contrast to promises of a high-wage economy by Prime Minister Boris Johnson - Frape, like others, is bracing for a further hit to her finances in April.</p> <p>That is when energy bills are due to jump 54% to around 2,000 pounds (\$2,723) a year per household - only some of which will be offset by emergency government support - and when social security contributions paid by workers are also due to increase, all against the backdrop of rising interest rates.</p> <p>Frape says spending on food and petrol has already risen by 20 pounds a week. She and her 14-year old daughter have had to limit car journeys to help accumulate some savings for April. The little flags pinned to a wall map that show their previous holiday destinations are unlikely to be added to this year.</p> <p>"There's just too much going up at once," Frape told Reuters in her immaculate home in Ashford, a town in south-east England, not far from the entrance to the Channel Tunnel. "The pressure is just going to be even worse in April."</p> <p>INFLATION'S CLIMB</p>

With economies around the world rebounding from coronavirus lockdowns, prices for everything from food and clothes to haircuts and rent, as well as energy are going up, fuelled by resurgent demand and shortages due to supply chain disruptions.

Accurate national comparisons of changes in living standards are hard to make but concerns about inflation are emerging as a big factor in elections including France's presidential race in April and U.S. midterm elections in November.

Britain's consumer price inflation rate hit 5.5% in the 12 months to January, the highest since 1992 when the economy was feeling the after-effects of a late-1980s spending boom driven by Margaret Thatcher's tax cuts and big pay deals.

The CPI is set to top 7% in April. The BoE thinks it will then start to slow but will still be above 5% in a year's time.

Inflation in the United States has already surpassed 7% to reach its highest since the early 1980s, and in the euro zone it hit a record 5.1% in January.

Frape, who works as housekeeper in a care home and has been in the industry since she was 18, is being urged by colleagues as their union representative to demand a pay rise above April's government-mandated 6.6% increase in the minimum wage.

Wage demand pressure, and the risk that it drives a self-perpetuating high inflation problem, is a big worry for the BoE.

Governor Andrew Bailey drew howls of protests from unions this month when he called for restraint in pay talks.

The BoE thinks underlying wage growth will hit almost 5% this year before easing.

Lower-income households are feeling the inflation pinch harder than higher earners, many of whom made big savings during the pandemic on commuting, holidays and going out.

The National Institute of Economic and Social Research, a think tank, estimates the combination of April's payroll tax increase and higher inflation could drive a 30% rise in destitution in the world's fifth-largest economy.

The Trussell Trust, which supports a network of food banks, said delivery of food parcels rose 11% between April and September last year compared with the same period of 2019, and hit one of its highest ever levels in December.

At Dad's House, a food bank in west London, some people who used to donate are now among the 500 families who get support each week. Jackie Gordon, 52, said she often goes without food. "I have to pay my bills," she said. "I'm behind with my rent and I don't want to get evicted."

## SHARP BUT SHORT?

The government is hoping the cost-of-living squeeze, while sharp, will be short-lived.

It will spread some of the fuel price increase over the coming years and cut a tax for people in lower-value properties to provide support through 2022.

Capital Economics believes household disposable income, adjusted for inflation, might recover as soon as early 2023 as inflation drops more quickly than the BoE expects and unemployment remains lower.

	<p>The consultancy forecast a peak-to-trough fall in real wages of 2.6% between September 2021 and April 2022 compared with a drawn-out drop of 13.5% after the global financial crisis as wages rose by less than inflation between 2008 and 2014.</p> <p>But Rebecca McDonald, senior economist at the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, which campaigns on poverty issues, said 2022 was likely to leave a lasting mark on poorer households even if inflation falls sharply.</p> <p>"It's going to feel like a much more longer-term issue because this year is going to be incredibly difficult," McDonald said, predicting many families would resort to debt or going into arrears this year.</p> <p>Frape said she was routinely checking her bank balance after the strains on her budget intensified earlier this year. The extra outlays keep on coming: her daughter's annual bus pass is expected to rise by 80 pounds, or more than 20%.</p> <p>She works three days a week but said she would lose income from tax credits if she worked longer hours. Frape says her cautious approach has served her well for now, although it underscores why so many retailers and hospitality outlets expect a torrid 2022.</p> <p>Soon, she said, the government will need to go further.</p> <p>"I think it's a really sad situation that people are struggling to live. They're working so many hours and draining themselves and still can't make ends meet," Frape said. "Something's got to give."</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>02/21 Frackers push into once-dead shale areas</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/frackers-push-into-once-dead-shale-patches-as-oil-nears-100-a-barrel-11645439400">https://www.wsj.com/articles/frackers-push-into-once-dead-shale-patches-as-oil-nears-100-a-barrel-11645439400</a>
GIST	<p>Spurred by the <a href="#">highest oil prices in years</a>, shale companies are moving drilling rigs back into oil fields that were all but abandoned a few years ago.</p> <p>Private oil producers are leading an industry return to places like the Anadarko Basin of Oklahoma and the DJ Basin in Colorado, where drilling had almost completely stopped in mid-2020 when those areas became unprofitable because of lower oil prices.</p> <p>Oil production in these marginal regions isn't expected to move the needle in the global market, which is facing tight supplies, but it could help some oil producers who have lost money in past years. Output in the contiguous U.S. <a href="#">by year-end is expected to increase</a> almost solely from the Permian Basin of West Texas and New Mexico, offset by declines elsewhere, according to energy consultant Wood Mackenzie.</p> <p>Some of the largest shale companies told investors this past week they plan <a href="#">to remain disciplined</a> on capital spending and <a href="#">limit production growth</a>. But with oil climbing above \$90 a barrel, near the highest levels in more than seven years, some peripheral drilling, particularly by smaller companies, is now becoming more feasible even in places like Kansas and Utah, where wells produce far less oil than prolific fields in Texas and New Mexico. The regional revivals show the economic ripple effects when prices surge and mark a turnaround for companies hard-hit by the pandemic.</p> <p>Brent, the global oil benchmark, rose to \$95.39 a barrel Monday, up almost 2%.</p> <p>Charter Oak Production Co. is planning to bring one drilling rig back to the Anadarko Basin this month and contract a larger rig to work there until late 2022, in hopes of doubling or tripling its output from about 1,000 barrels a day. Though oil-field costs have climbed sharply amid new activity and inflation, Charter founder Joe Brevetti said the clock is ticking for his drilling plans because, at some point, high commodity prices will dent demand and lead to lower prices.</p>

“We have a limited window of opportunity,” Mr. Brevetti said. “Our costs are obviously up right now, but I’d rather have the higher costs and sell the product at \$90.”

Mr. Brevetti’s company waited out the oil-demand destruction wrought by the pandemic, slashing drilling activity and storing as many as 60,000 barrels of oil in empty tanks that typically hold other materials used in fracking, instead of selling the oil at low prices. Those moves were key to helping the company survive the downturn, he said.

Putting drilling rigs back to work in the Anadarko Basin wouldn’t have made sense when oil prices were around \$45 a barrel or lower in 2020, with some companies needing at least \$60-per-barrel oil, or even \$80 a barrel, to increase investments, executives said.

The average number of active drilling rigs in the Anadarko Basin has surged from the pandemic low of seven to 46, according to energy data analytics firm Enverus. The latest number is several more than the region had before oil prices collapsed because of economic shutdowns in the spring of 2020, and almost double the average of mid-2021.

In the DJ Basin in Colorado, the average number of active rigs has risen to 15, up from four in 2020, Enverus data show. In the Powder River Basin in Wyoming and the Uinta Basin in Utah, which both saw rigs fall to zero in mid-2020, the rig count has increased to almost a dozen. All three areas need higher oil prices to make wells profitable.

This past week, oil producer [Crescent Energy](#) Co. said it would buy assets in the Uinta Basin for \$815 million in cash and plans to operate two rigs there this year. Utah is pumping the most oil since late 2014, though it makes up less than 1% of the nation’s output.

Companies have started pumping more oil from regions that yield tiny wells by industry standards. Private oil producer Palomino Petroleum Inc. is now running as many as six drilling rigs this year in western Kansas, the largest fleet it has had there in about seven years. The wells it drills there typically start producing about 50 to 100 barrels a day. That oil is moved by truck to a refinery in central Kansas.

Klee Watchous, Palomino’s president, said oil prices climbing back to \$90 a barrel has marked a sharp turnaround in the fortunes of both the company and the small towns near its operations. Mr. Watchous said his company is also planning to drill wells in Illinois this year, a state where rigs have rarely ventured recently.

“After many years of fighting this low oil-price situation, it feels great,” Mr. Watchous said. “The cycles of boom and bust have been part of the oil-and-gas industry for decades, and no one knows how long it will last.”

Still, the renewed investment in many of the regions is nowhere near the levels they saw during shale’s peak years. Most of the largest, publicly traded companies are still focusing instead on top-tier fields like the Permian.

Activity in the Anadarko basin is well below its 2018 levels. Investor interest in the region faded around 2019 following disappointing oil-well performance. Oil companies and their service providers cut hundreds of jobs in the region as activity waned. [Some industry observers are hopeful](#) that the region could see the number of drilling rigs there climb above 100 again and bring back jobs, but said that would take years of high oil prices.

Even though the region is on the upswing, some larger private companies are taking a conservative approach. Citizen Energy, a private producer based in Tulsa, Okla., is reinvesting around 50% of the money it generates from operations back into capital expenditures on developing its assets, said finance chief Tim Helms. In shale’s heyday, companies almost always spent more money on drilling and fracking than they made selling the oil and gas.

	<p>Mr. Helms said Citizen is now running four rigs in the Anadarko Basin, up from two that targeted natural gas in 2020. While the company may consider adding rigs if prices stay high for a long time, it is still focused on generating cash flow while increasing output around 10% this year, he said.</p> <p>“The financial model would tell you to put eight rigs at work,” Mr. Helms said. “We, like the rest of the industry, have learned our lessons about growing at all costs.”</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>02/22 Russia paying hefty financial price</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.cnn.com/2022/02/22/investing/russia-markets-ruble-economy/index.html">https://www.cnn.com/2022/02/22/investing/russia-markets-ruble-economy/index.html</a>
GIST	<p><b>London (CNN Business)</b>Russian stocks plunged and the ruble slid closer to a record low on Tuesday as investors reacted to President Vladimir Putin's <a href="#">decision to order troops into eastern Ukraine</a>.</p> <p><a href="#">Moscow's MOEX stock index dropped</a> 4% after shedding more than 10% on Monday, bringing losses so far this year to over 20%. In total, more than \$40 billion has been wiped off the value of Russian stocks this week alone.</p> <p>The ruble fell toward 81 versus the US dollar on Tuesday, its weakest level in more than a year and close to its record low. The <a href="#">moves</a> prompted Russia's central bank to announce measures to support banks, including a provision that will allow them to use last Friday's prices for stocks and bonds when reporting their financial positions.</p> <p>More pain could be on the way.</p> <p>"We expect further declines near-term in the Russian stock market," analysts at JPMorgan Chase wrote in a note to clients on Tuesday. The Wall Street bank downgraded Russian equities to "neutral" from "overweight."</p> <p>Damage to Russia's markets and economy would be limited if its troops do not advance beyond the parts of eastern Ukraine that Putin recognized as independent on Monday, according to analysts. But Russia would pay a higher price if further aggression <a href="#">causes the West to respond</a> with punishing sanctions that could cut the country's banks off from the global financial system and make it difficult to export oil and natural gas.</p> <p>Germany said Tuesday it was <a href="#">halting certification of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline</a>, built by Russia's Gazprom under the Baltic Sea with the aim of boosting its capacity to supply Europe with natural gas without piping it through Ukraine.</p> <p>Analysts at Capital Economics said Tuesday that the most commonly discussed sanctions could knock 1% off Russia's gross domestic product, but more aggressive measures such as blocking Russia from the SWIFT global payments system could reduce economic output by 5%.</p> <p>According to Capital Economics, Russia is in a better position to withstand an economic shock than in 2014, when Western sanctions and plummeting oil prices combined to knock roughly 2.5% off the country's GDP and spark a financial crisis. Russia has more foreign currency reserves, its external debt is lower, and its financial connections with major economies are smaller.</p> <p>Russian ratings agency ACRA estimates that the country's banks <a href="#">imported \$5 billion worth of banknotes</a> in foreign currencies in December, up from \$2.65 billion a year before, according to Reuters.</p> <p><b>Sanctions hit</b></p> <p>US President Joe Biden plans to impose new sanctions on two parts of eastern Ukraine that Putin recognized as independent, the White House said Monday. But the United States is keeping other measures in reserve.</p>



"The Western response has so far been ... symbolic," said analysts at Capital Economics. "The US and EU have said they will announce more sanctions today, though they are expected to still be at the very light end of the scale, in part so that more severe measures could be held back to deter Russia" from further aggression.

Much depends on Putin's next moves.

"The key question now is how far into Ukraine President Putin wants to go," said Societe Generale analyst Kit Juckes. "Clearly, pushing beyond the current area of conflict would escalate the situation as Russian troops engaged with Ukrainian forces."

Russia's economy could be in for a major shock, but that doesn't mean there won't be blowback for other countries.

US crude futures jumped nearly 4% to trade at \$93.50 per barrel on Tuesday. Brent crude, the global benchmark, surged 5% to \$98 per barrel.

Russia is one of the world's biggest producers of oil, and a major exporter of natural gas. Investors fear that conflict in Ukraine could limit or stop the flow of Russian gas into Europe, making it much more expensive for people to heat and light their homes.

In a worst case scenario, oil prices could surge as high as \$140 per barrel, according to Capital Economics. That would add upward pressure to inflation in major economies around the world and make interest rate hikes more likely.

"Given the current high rates of inflation, and corresponding concerns about it feeding higher inflation expectations, it's possible that this adds to the list of reasons for policymakers to raise interest rates," wrote analysts at Capital Economics.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	02/22 Germany suspends Nord Stream 2 pipeline
SOURCE	<a href="https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-business-germany-europe-berlin-79e3dafb0d231f6a033613b7dab78cdf?utm_medium=AP&amp;utm_campaign=SocialFlow&amp;utm_source=Twitter">https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-business-germany-europe-berlin-79e3dafb0d231f6a033613b7dab78cdf?utm_medium=AP&amp;utm_campaign=SocialFlow&amp;utm_source=Twitter</a>
GIST	<p>BERLIN (AP) — Germany has taken steps to halt the process of certifying the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline from Russia, Chancellor Olaf Scholz said Tuesday, as the West started taking punitive measures against Moscow over the <a href="#">Ukraine crisis</a>.</p> <p>Scholz said his government made the decision in response to Russian President Vladimir <a href="#">Putin's recognition of the independence of two breakaway regions in eastern Ukraine</a> that he said marked a "serious break of international law."</p> <p>"Now it's up to the international community to react to this one-sided, incomprehensible and unjustified action by the Russian president," he told reporters in Berlin, adding that it was necessary to "send a clear signal to Moscow that such actions won't remain without consequences."</p> <p>The decision is a significant move for the German government, which had long resisted pulling the plug on the project despite pressure from the United States and some European countries to do so. Washington has for years argued that building <a href="#">another pipeline bringing natural gas from Russia to Germany</a> increases Europe's reliance on Russian <a href="#">energy supplies</a>.</p> <p>"The situation now is fundamentally different," Scholz said, explaining that the government had decided to withdraw a report on the impact that the pipeline — which hasn't begun operating yet — would have on the security of Germany's gas supplies.</p>

	<p>“That may sound technical, but it’s a necessary administrative step without which the certification of the pipeline cannot happen now,” he said.</p> <p>Scholz added that Germany’s Economy Ministry would reassess the situation in light of the latest developments.</p> <p>“That will certainly take time, if I may say so,” he added.</p> <p>Germany meets about a quarter of its energy needs with natural gas, a share that will increase in the coming years as the country switches off its last three nuclear power plants and phases out the use of coal. About half of the natural gas used in Germany comes from Russia.</p> <p>The government aims to end the use of all fossil fuels in Germany by 2045.</p>
	<a href="#">Return to Top</a>

HEADLINE	<b>02/21 Study debunks need Covid deep cleaning</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.thedailybeast.com/deep-cleaning-wont-save-us-from-covid-and-this-new-study-says-why?ref=home">https://www.thedailybeast.com/deep-cleaning-wont-save-us-from-covid-and-this-new-study-says-why?ref=home</a>
GIST	<p>Remember the COVID deep-cleanse? Two years ago, in the early days of the coronavirus pandemic in the United States, many businesses and even homeowners obsessively sprayed disinfectant on open surfaces, aggressively wiping down and scrubbing every countertop and desk and table.</p> <p>The fear back then was that the SARS-CoV-2 pathogen might survive on and spread via surfaces. People were afraid that simply sitting at a table after an infected person would expose them to COVID-19.</p> <p>That fear was bunk.</p> <p>It was soon apparent from contact-tracing and other epidemiological analyses that COVID spread pretty much exclusively via aerosols, those fine mists we all exhale as we breathe, talk, laugh, cough, and sneeze. There are few, if any, documented cases of the novel coronavirus spreading by way of “fomites,” the scientific term for virus-covered surfaces.</p> <p>Now we’re finally beginning to understand why this is the case. <a href="#">A new study</a> led by Jessica Kramer, a biomedical engineer at the University of Utah, found that the same spittle that helps spread the virus in the air actually <i>blocks</i> it from later infecting someone via surfaces as the liquid dries.</p> <p>“Our data indicate that the mucin molecular structure plays a complex and important role in host defense,” Kramer and her teammates wrote in their peer-reviewed study, published on Feb. 14 in the journal of the American Chemical Society.</p> <p><a href="#">The safe, highly effective vaccines</a> (available for free in the U.S.!) are still the best way to protect yourself from COVID, of course. But no vaccine is perfect. As a backup to vaccine-induced immunity, we could make our homes and businesses safer. But as Kramer’s study indicates, a deep clean isn’t the way. “The risk of contracting coronavirus from touching a surface is quite low,” she told The Daily Beast.</p> <p>That’s not what researchers claimed early in the pandemic. <a href="#">One study</a>, published in <i>The New England Journal of Medicine</i> in April 2020, found that the SARS-CoV-2 pathogen remained “viable” on surfaces for up to three days. <a href="#">Other studies claimed</a> the virus remained viable for up to several <i>weeks</i>.</p> <p>But there was a problem with those early experiments: prior studies on surface transmission looked at the virus’s survival in water. “But, of course, people don’t sneeze out water,” said Kramer. “They sneeze out mucus.”</p>



Viruses interact differently with water than they do with mucus, Herek Clack, a University of Michigan engineer who specializes in protection from viruses, told The Daily Beast. For one, mucus evaporates slower than water does, Clack said.

More importantly, our snot and saliva contain proteins as well as sugars called “glycans.” Water doesn’t. And those proteins and sugars make a huge difference when it comes to spreading, or *not* spreading, the coronavirus via surfaces.

“When we add mucus [or] saliva proteins, the virus could no longer infect live cells,” Kramer explained. “Our data explain why epidemiologists have found surface transmission is low-risk in the real world, despite early lab studies that found infectious virus on surfaces for weeks.”

Kramer and her team didn’t actually conduct tests with the SARS-CoV-2 virus, given how dangerous that would be. Instead, they used a different coronavirus called OC43, which causes less severe respiratory infections in people than SARS-COV-2. “The two viruses are structurally very similar so it’s a good surrogate,” Kramer said.

The scientists added samples of OC43 to droplets of cow saliva, which is similar to human saliva, and placed them on a variety of surfaces. They waited varying spans of time (ranging from five minutes to an entire day) for the droplets to evaporate, then exposed the dried-out virus to a “cellular growth medium”—i.e., simulated human tissue.

Then they waited another five days for the virus to infect the samples, something virologists term the “cytopathic effect,” or CPE.

Incredibly, that never really happened. “For the simulated sneeze droplets with mucin, we observed very little CPE from the five-minute dry sample,” Kramer said. After five minutes, virus that splattered onto a surface inside protein-rich mucus was 96 percent less likely to cause infection than virus that landed on a surface inside a protein-free water droplet. After a day, the mucin-soaked virus was 99 percent less likely to cause an infection.

The surface the droplets landed on made no difference. “We tested glass, plastic, metal, and surgical masks and mucus works on all of them,” Kramer said.

So why would mucus cripple the coronavirus? The answer, Kramer and her teammates concluded, lies in the distinctive spike protein that helps coronaviruses grab onto and infect our cells. In a droplet of snot or spit, there are plenty of proteins for the virus’s spikes to grab. The glycans seem to encourage the process. After a few minutes, the spikes are all “full,” so to speak.

It’s a process scientists call “binding.” “We think that the virus and mucus proteins concentrate together when they dry and that improves binding,” Kramer said.

In a sense, the same mechanism that allows SARS-CoV-2 to spread via airborne droplets also greatly limits its spread on surfaces. The difference is wetness. Airborne coronaviruses, when we inhale them, are still wet, so they still have spike proteins that are free to bind to other things, including our healthy cells.

But a virus that’s evaporating on a tabletop somewhere grabs all the proteins it can as the surrounding fluid disappears. By the time the virus is dry, its spikes are full. In Kramer’s experiment, even rehydrating a desiccated virus with a drop of water didn’t restore its infectivity.

“This is an important study as it highlights that mucins and their glycans may play a central role in preventing our bodies from coronavirus infection,” Katharina Ribbeck, a biochemist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology who was not involved with Kramer’s study, told The Daily Beast.

Obviously, the biggest implication of the new findings is that we can stop stressing about sterilizing surfaces. Sure, a good scrubbing might help keep your kitchen clean and prevent bacterial contamination of food (and clean smell is a nice bonus). But it's not going to do much to prevent COVID.

Instead, once you've gotten vaccinated and boosted, try increasing ventilation of indoor spaces. Fast turnover of indoor air can dissipate the aerosols that are responsible for most COVID transmission. "A greater focus on addressing airborne spread would be good," Douglas Reed, an expert in respiratory viruses at the University of Pittsburgh, told The Daily Beast.

But better ventilation is no panacea, of course. "Vaccination, masks and avoiding crowded areas with poor ventilation continue to be our best defenses," Kramer said.

Kramer said she hopes she and her team, as well as other scientists, will build on this initial study. One goal is to test a wider variety of coronaviruses, ultimately exposing samples of SARS-CoV-2 to a whole lot of actual human mucus.

"We hypothesize that people's mucus will be more or less protective based on their genetics, diet, environment, et cetera, but we have yet to prove that," Kramer said. "We need to collect, purify and analyze many human mucus samples, which does present challenges—people don't usually like their lungs [and] eyes scraped!"

Kramer's research could eventually lead to new non-vaccine drugs for preventing COVID. The idea would be to "mimic" the proteins in mucus and somehow incorporate them in a pill that could "block the virus from infecting our cells," she said.

A hypothetical mucus-based medicine would be a welcome addition to the growing number of prescription pills for treating COVID infections. Unlike anti-COVID drugs such as Pfizer's paxlovid, you might take the mucus-derived pill before infection sets in. Say, right before or right after exposure to people with COVID.

A mucus-based med is still just an idea, albeit a promising one. For now, it might be reassuring to have hard science to back up what many of us realized a couple years ago. Deep-cleaning your home or business is nice. But it won't stop COVID.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	<b>02/21 Houses of worship face clergy shortage</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/houses-of-worship-face-clergy-shortage-as-many-resign-during-pandemic-11645452000?mod=hp_listb_pos1">https://www.wsj.com/articles/houses-of-worship-face-clergy-shortage-as-many-resign-during-pandemic-11645452000?mod=hp_listb_pos1</a>
GIST	<p>For eight years, Keith Mudiappa accepted the challenges of serving as pastor at his nondenominational Minneapolis church—the 70-hour workweeks, the low pay, the calls from parishioners at all hours—in exchange for the joy of seeing people come to the faith.</p> <p>But the rewards of the job were tough to come by during nearly two years of <a href="#">online-only services</a>. Late last year, Mr. Mudiappa quit and moved with his wife and children to Florida. He now works at a bank. "I decided I wanted to take care of my family," he said. "I don't think I could do that in a church setting."</p> <p>In religious groups across the country, clergy members are stepping down from the pulpit.</p> <p>They say the job, always demanding, has become almost impossible during the pandemic: Relationships with and among parishioners have frayed while meeting only over video, and political divisions have deepened, fueled by fights over <a href="#">Covid-19 protocols</a>.</p> <p>Though no national data about clergy resignations exists, an October study from the Barna Group, which studies faith in the U.S., found that 38% of pastors were seriously considering leaving full-time ministry, up from 29% in January 2021. Among pastors under age 45, nearly half were considering quitting.</p>

In some denominations, resignations are exacerbating clergy shortages that began long before the pandemic. As the country has grown more secular, [seminaries have closed](#) and the pipeline of faith leaders has dwindled. The labor shortage within the clergy, which parallels shortages in other industries, is reshaping worship in some parts of the country as more congregations search for ways to operate without a pastor.

Leaders of the Conservative Jewish movement sent an email to synagogues in December, warning that at least 80 of the movement's roughly 600 synagogues would be looking for a new rabbi this year; they expected at most 60 rabbis would be looking for new jobs. In the Reform Jewish movement, the country's largest Jewish denomination, there are 5% to 10% more congregations searching for a rabbi than in a normal year, according to leaders.

Some 3,544 Catholic parishes in the U.S. lack a parish priest, up 25% from in 2000, according to Georgetown University's Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate. The Diocese of Buffalo, N.Y., recently launched a pilot program in which as many as six parishes share one priest.

In the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, at least 10% of its roughly 120 churches in Montana are looking for a pastor—and still more don't have a pastor but can't afford to hire one. Some are beginning to explore sharing a pastor with other mainline denominations, including Methodists and Presbyterians.

"Pastors are tired," said Laurie Jungling, the ELCA's bishop for Montana, who said the departure of pastors from their pulpits began accelerating in the summer of 2020. "They're giving a lot of themselves to help folks deal with the trauma of the pandemic. They've had to face polarization in their own congregations, people's anger and frustration about masks and vaccines, whether to have worship or not."

In eight years as lead pastor of Rainier Avenue Church in Seattle, Peter Chin built the congregation from about 200 in weekly attendance to around 700 before the pandemic forced them online.

Over the past two years, the congregation has met almost exclusively over video. Relationships have suffered, Mr. Chin said. Staff have resigned, leaving more work for him, and finding replacements has been harder than it used to be, as the nation's labor markets have tightened. There are disagreements over vaccine policy, politics and whether to gather in person.

"I love to see real change in people's lives where they don't feel hope or don't feel community," and then find it at church, he said. "I still find a lot of joy in that. But the scale of it, versus the controversy over mandates, political disagreements, expectations that come with pastoring even in the best scenarios—it feels lopsided now."

Clergy leaving the pulpit now have more options than they did a quarter-century ago. In addition to those making wholesale career changes, some go into chaplain roles. Others are moving to nonprofits, which usually have more limited hours and emotional expectations.

Noah Farkas had expected to remain a pulpit rabbi his entire career. But after 13 years at a Los Angeles synagogue, he left to run the Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles, the largest Jewish nonprofit in the area. It became hard to hold the community together during the trauma of the pandemic, he said.

"You get to a point where, after being in the place for over a decade, and you see your friends and parents of your friends dying, it takes a toll," Rabbi Farkas said.

Some denominations say the pandemic hasn't affected clergy staffing. A study last year from Lifeway Research found that evangelical and Black Protestant pastors were more likely than in 2015 to say they were frequently overwhelmed and on call 24-hours a day, but that the rate at which they were leaving the pulpit was effectively unchanged.

	<p>Still, more congregations around the country now are learning how to cope without an ordained leader. In the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in Montana, some pastors serve congregations that are 100 miles apart. Laypeople are trained to lead services when there is no pastor.</p> <p>Mosaic Law Congregation, a Conservative Jewish synagogue in Sacramento, Calif., has spent much of the pandemic without a full-time rabbi since its prior leader of 25 years retired in 2020. A retired rabbi led services on Zoom from Montreal for months, and congregants filled in for events such as funerals and bar mitzvahs.</p> <p>The congregation has hired a full-time rabbi who starts this year, but Executive Director Caren Rubin said she has warned members that they can't expect him to remain another quarter-century.</p> <p>"It's like corporate culture," Ms. Rubin said. "People don't stay."</p> <p>Mr. Mudiappa said he works regular hours now in Florida and earns almost 39% more. His wife, who also worked at the church in Minneapolis, can stay home with their two children.</p> <p>"I was always on the phone. You feel guilty spending time with your family, because there are a lot of other needs," he said. "I'm enjoying weekends now. The weekends used to be chaos."</p>
	<a href="#">Return to Top</a>

HEADLINE	<b>02/21 US wrestles: did Russia officially 'invade'?</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/02/21/biden-russia-ukraine-putin/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/02/21/biden-russia-ukraine-putin/</a>
GIST	<p>The White House on Monday confronted the reality that its months-long effort to avert a Russian invasion of Ukraine would likely be futile, as officials grasped for last-ditch ways to head off what one called "military action that could take place in the coming hours or days."</p> <p>Russian President Vladimir Putin spent the holiday weekend effectively closing off one diplomatic path after another, suggesting ever more clearly that he would not be swayed by diplomacy or deterred by sanctions. And by announcing that he was recognizing two pro-Russian separatist regions of Ukraine and ordering troops into them, he forced the United States into an uneasy dilemma about whether that constituted an invasion.</p> <p>The Biden administration sought to hit back at Russia's aggressive action while stopping short of declaring that it had officially invaded Ukraine, which would have triggered the array of hard-hitting sanctions President Biden has been warning about for months.</p> <p>Instead, amid meetings Monday with his national security advisers and calls with several foreign leaders, Biden and his team reiterated their grim assessment of the crisis and imposed a smaller set of sanctions prohibiting U.S. investment and trade specifically in the breakaway regions.</p> <p>Administration officials said additional measures — including more sanctions — would be announced Tuesday, and emphasized that the newly announced sanctions are different from the much larger ones Biden has been threatening should Putin invade Ukraine.</p> <p>Ian Bremmer, president of the Eurasia Group, a global security consultancy, said Putin's actions followed a certain logic, enabling him to make a move against Ukraine while throwing the West into uncertainty about whether it was serious enough to merit a full-blown response. Western diplomats have been predicting for days that Putin would, initially at least, take actions short of a full-scale invasion and capture of Kyiv, such as a cyberattack or a limited incursion.</p> <p>"If I were advising Putin, I would tell him to do this because we have a problem now," Bremmer said. Putin has deliberately "not gone all in" yet, Bremmer said, because "the entire point is, don't make it easy on the West to respond."</p>

Earlier in the day, Putin delivered a televised address saying he had little choice but to recognize the pro-Russian separatist regions of Donetsk and Luhansk, enclaves within Ukraine that have been a source of bitter Russia-Ukraine tensions. Russia has increasingly suggested, with little evidence, that residents of those regions are under threat from the Ukrainian military.

In a call with reporters Monday evening, a senior Biden administration official warned that Putin's address "was a speech to the Russian people to justify a war."

Biden officials depicted Putin's actions to this point, including regular complaints that Ukraine has acted belligerently, as an elaborate form of theater designed to portray Russia as a victim of NATO aggression and create a pretext for his longtime desire to reabsorb Ukraine into the Russian orbit.

"No one should mistake these theatrics as legitimate statecraft," the official said, speaking on the condition of anonymity to share details of a rapidly unfolding situation. "This is Potemkin politics, President Putin accelerating the very conflict that he's created."

Still, the administration official repeatedly refused to say whether Putin's decision to send "peacekeeping" troops into the two Russian-backed separatist areas constituted a red-line invasion in the eyes of the Biden administration. If anything, the official tried to portray Monday's developments as far short of a dramatic change in the status quo.

"Russia has occupied these regions since 2014," said the official, a point he emphasized several times throughout the call. "It has been Russia's position that there are not Russian forces present in this part of the Donbas. The reality, as we pointed out on a number of occasions over these past years, has been quite different. There have been Russian forces present in these areas throughout."

After the call, a different administration official defined a Russian invasion that would prompt a clear U.S. response as crossing into Ukrainian territory that Russia has "not occupied since 2014."

Not everyone agreed. Donetsk and Luhansk are not generally recognized as independent countries, and some experts suggested that sending troops to them amounted to dispatching a military force into Ukraine itself.

Michael McFaul, the U.S. ambassador to Russia under President Barack Obama, tweeted that "Russia is invading Ukraine right now."

"When you describe Russian soldiers invading Ukraine right now as 'peacekeepers', even when you use quotation marks, you are using language that Putin wants you to use," he wrote in a follow-up tweet. "Call it what it is — an invasion."

Bremmer said that what played out publicly Monday was the United States backing down from its previous threat to impose severe sanctions if Russia entered Ukraine.

"What the Americans had been saying until today was 'One troop, one tank — serious sanctions,' and we are recognizing in short order that they have just done this and we're not sure we have our allies on board completely, and that's a problem," Bremmer said. "We're getting jammed here. This is why Putin did this. It is completely the right strategy for Putin."

Biden, meanwhile, who early in the weekend had nixed a last-minute trip to his home in Wilmington, Del., spent part of the day huddled with his national security team — a group that included Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin; Secretary of State Antony Blinken; CIA Director William J. Burns; Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines; Department of Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas; Gen. Mark A. Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; and Treasury Secretary Janet L. Yellen.

Biden also spoke by phone Monday with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, reaffirming the U.S. commitment to Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. He also had a joint call with French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz to discuss the situation.

Blinken had been tentatively scheduled to meet with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on Thursday, provided that Russia did not invade Ukraine. Administration officials declined to say on Monday whether that meeting was still on.

On Sunday, the administration had also floated the prospect of a summit between Biden and Putin assuming, again, that Russia did not move ahead with an invasion and the United States thought such a summit could advance diplomatic negotiations. On Monday's call with reporters, the senior administration official did not completely rule out that possibility but made clear that the likelihood of the two leaders meeting — as of Monday evening, at least — was close to zero.

The administration, the official said, "certainly can't commit to a meeting that has, as a predicate, that Russia won't take military action, when it looks imminently like they will."

In a tweet Monday, as Putin's latest actions became clear, Blinken directed harsh words at Russia.

"Kremlin recognition of the so-called 'Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics' as 'independent' requires a swift and firm response, and we will take appropriate steps in coordination with partners," the secretary of state wrote.

But as Presidents' Day weekend came to a close, the Biden administration's definition of a "swift and firm response" remained nearly as murky as what exactly constituted an invasion.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	<b>02/21 Retroactive decertification police officers</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/civil-rights-groups-seek-retroactive-application-of-new-police-decertification-statute/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/civil-rights-groups-seek-retroactive-application-of-new-police-decertification-statute/</a>
GIST	<p>A coalition of more than 40 activist and civil rights groups has petitioned the Washington State Criminal Justice Training Commission (CJTC), seeking to ensure it vigorously applies new standards that significantly expand circumstances when troubled police officers can lose their badges.</p> <p>The coalition, led by the American Civil Liberties Union of Washington, wants to make sure that the commission understands that new standards outlined in Senate Bill 5051, which took effect July 25, can and should be retroactively applied to significant cases of misconduct that occurred before that date.</p> <p>The measure, passed by the Washington Legislature last year, accomplished a number of goals, including expanding the size of the commission and the scope of its responsibilities. <a href="#">It greatly expanded the grounds for denial, revocation or suspension of an officer's certification.</a></p> <p>The letter was written in response to concerns "that an internal decision may have been made to limit the application" of the new standards only to conduct that occurred after the July 25 implementation date, the letter said.</p> <p>"The conduct of the 10,000+ law enforcement officers under the CJTC's authority is relevant to their fitness for duty — yesterday, today and tomorrow," the group wrote in <a href="#">the Feb. 14 letter addressed to CJTC Director Monica Alexander</a>. "The CJTC cannot fulfill its mission to 'promote the public trust and confidence in every aspect of the criminal justice system' while there are persons in the ranks with serious misconduct beyond the reach of the commission."</p> <p>Authors of the measure, and police accountability experts at the ACLU who worked to ensure its passage, say the measure contains no such limiting language and that its intent was to arm the commission with</p>



significantly expanded powers to revoke the certification of rogue or unscrupulous officers “regardless of when these offenses were committed or adjudicated.”

The measure expanded the membership of the commission to include people whose lives have been affected by police violence or misconduct. It also requires an agency conduct background checks on any officer it hires, whether just out of the academy or on a lateral transfer from another agency.

The measure also includes new discretionary language, giving the commission the option to revoke or suspend an officer’s certification in circumstances that, before the law’s implementation, would not have resulted in sanctions. That includes instances in which an officer’s agency found they had used excessive force, cases of racial discrimination and instances in which officer conduct was criminal, regardless of whether there was a conviction in a court of law.

“This is about someone’s license and their suitability to be a police officer,” said Enoka Herat, the attorney overseeing police practices and immigration at the ACLU of Washington. “When misconduct occurred should not impact that. There are cases where someone’s conduct before July 25 where this law should be applied.”

Alexander said the commission will discuss the issue at its meeting Wednesday.

She declined to predict the outcome of the discussion or offer her opinion on the letter before that meeting, but acknowledged that there had been “a lot of conversation” about the intent of the new legislation and whether its provisions should be applied retroactively.

She said there are concerns about revisiting older misconduct cases to apply the new, significantly more expansive provisions for decertification. “We have to ask ourselves what is fair and what is the moral thing to do,” Alexander said.

The legislation was written by state Sen. Jamie Pedersen, D-Seattle, and Anne Levinson, a former judge and longtime police accountability advocate, who said the measure contains no limiting language that would preclude its application to misconduct that occurred before its implementation. Indeed, she said that was part of its intent.

“It allows the commission to consider in certain circumstances events that occurred before July 25,” Levinson said. “Its intent is to significantly strengthen accountability statewide. It was with intentionality the commission has been given this discretion.”

The letter outlines several recent examples of officer behavior that occurred before July 25 that could be reviewed by the commission for sanctions, including the case of [Kent Assistant Police Chief Derek Kammerzell, who was disciplined but not fired](#) in 2020 for posting Nazi rank insignia on his office door, joking about the Holocaust and adopting the Nazi title of “obergruppenfuhrer”; and [Pierce County Sheriff Ed Troyer, who has been charged and is pending trial](#) for allegedly filing a false report after calling 911 on a Black newspaper delivery person in January 2021.

However, Levinson and Pedersen, the measure’s sponsor, said there are obviously limits to the extent the commission should review past bad behavior: It should be fairly recent or significant, or be part of a pattern that calls into question the officer’s suitability to carry a gun and badge.

“We did not intend to make the CJTC into a truth and reconciliation commission and go back through the past 75 years of history to address every instance of police misconduct,” Pedersen said. “The key question we want them to ask is whether this individual’s continued presence as a law enforcement officer undermines public confidence in the system as a whole.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	02/22 New Zealand police, protesters clash
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/protester-drives-at-new-zealand-police-as-cordon-tightens/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/protester-drives-at-new-zealand-police-as-cordon-tightens/</a>

## GIST

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) — One protester drove a car toward a New Zealand police line, narrowly avoiding officers, while other protesters sprayed officers with a stinging substance, police said Tuesday, as they tightened a cordon around a convoy that has been camped outside Parliament for two weeks.

The clashes in the capital of Wellington came a day after police reported that some of the protesters had thrown human feces at them.

Police Assistant Commissioner Richard Chambers told reporters the actions of some of the protesters, who oppose coronavirus vaccine mandates, were unacceptable and would be dealt with assertively.

“Our focus remains on opening the roads up to Wellingtonians and doing our absolute best to restore peaceful protest,” Chambers said. “The behavior of a certain group within the protest community is absolutely disgraceful.”

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said protesters had taken things too far and needed to return home.

“What’s happening in Wellington is wrong,” she said.

The latest clashes began after about 250 officers and staff arrived at dawn and used forklifts to move concrete barriers into a tighter cordon around the encampment, where hundreds of cars and trucks remain blocking city streets. Police have used the barriers this week to allow protest cars to leave but none to enter.

Video posted online shows a white car driving the wrong way down a one-way street toward a group of officers who quickly get out of the way while people shout. The vehicle comes to a stop at the police line and several officers climb inside and pull out the driver.

Police said the officers had been lucky to escape injury after the car stopped just short of colliding with them. They said they had arrested one person for driving in a dangerous manner and two others for obstructing police.

Chambers said the three officers who were sprayed with the unknown stinging substance had been treated at a hospital and were recovering well.

The protest, which began when a convoy of cars and trucks drove to Parliament, was inspired by similar protests in Canada. Protesters have been well organized, setting up tents on the lawns outside Parliament and trucking in portable toilets, crates of donated food, and bales of straw to lay down when the grass turned to mud after Parliament Speaker Trevor Mallard turned on the sprinklers and blasted Barry Manilow tunes in a failed effort to make them leave.

Protesters have even dug a vegetable garden, set up a daycare tent, and assembled makeshift showers as they signal their intent to stay for a long time.

New Zealand has mandated that certain workers get vaccinated against COVID-19, including teachers, doctors, nurses, police and military personnel. A vaccine pass is also required to enter most stores and restaurants.

The protests come as New Zealand experiences its first big COVID-19 outbreak, which has been fueled by the omicron variant. Daily case numbers jumped to a new high of more than 2,800 on Tuesday, although only a single patient was hospitalized in an intensive care unit. About 77% of the population is vaccinated.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, New Zealand has reported just 56 virus deaths among its population of 5 million, after it imposed strict border controls and lockdowns to eliminate earlier outbreaks.

	Ardern said earlier this week she plans to begin easing virus mandates and restrictions once the peak of the current outbreak has passed.
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	
HEADLINE	<b>02/21 England eases all coronavirus rules</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/02/21/world/covid-19-tests-cases-vaccine#england-is-set-to-ease-all-coronavirus-rules-as-queen-elizabeth-battles-an-infection">https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/02/21/world/covid-19-tests-cases-vaccine#england-is-set-to-ease-all-coronavirus-rules-as-queen-elizabeth-battles-an-infection</a>
GIST	<p>After almost two years of restrictions, Prime Minister Boris Johnson of Britain on Monday <a href="#">said it was time to live with the coronavirus</a>, announcing an end to England’s remaining legal curbs and most free testing, and making his country an outlier in its handling of the pandemic.</p> <p>Although careful not to declare the country’s health crisis officially over, Mr. Johnson sought to put the country firmly on the path to normalcy, albeit just a day after an announcement that <a href="#">Queen Elizabeth II had tested positive for the virus</a>.</p> <p>Some critics say that news underscores the risks of moving too quickly to scrap restrictions, while political opponents say that decisions are being taken in Downing Street to distract attention from <a href="#">a police investigation</a> into whether Mr. Johnson broke the coronavirus laws he himself set.</p> <p>In any event the statement is another political landmark for Mr. Johnson, setting his government ahead of most others in Europe in its speed in plotting a return to normal life. The new plan means that, starting Thursday, routine contact tracing will end and those who test positive will no longer be legally obliged to isolate themselves, although they will be urged to do so.</p> <p>The supply of free tests, which are currently available widely, will end on April 1 for all except the most vulnerable, effectively forcing people to pay to find out whether or not they are infected. Enhanced sick pay to support those suffering from coronavirus will end in late March.</p> <p>Speaking to Parliament, Mr. Johnson said he was setting out a strategy for living with the coronavirus, rather than declaring the pandemic at an end.</p> <p>“It is time that we got our confidence back, we don’t need laws to compel people to be considerate to others, we can rely on that sense of responsibility toward one another,” said Mr. Johnson. He added: “Let us learn to live with this virus.”</p> <p>Wishing Queen Elizabeth a speedy recovery, Mr. Johnson said that her illness was a reminder that “the virus has not gone away.” But, he said, “Whilst the pandemic is not over we have now passed the peak of the Omicron wave.”</p> <p>The rules would apply only to England, if the changes are approved by Parliament. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have their own powers over health issues and make their own rules.</p> <p>Even some of Mr. Johnson’s own lawmakers have expressed concern about the new strategy, particularly because of the restriction on the availability of free tests.</p> <p>On Monday, a cabinet discussion on the details of the move to end most free testing was delayed for a few hours at the last moment, with news reports saying there had been differences among ministers about the continuing costs of coronavirus measures. Over the weekend, Mr. Johnson said testing was costing taxpayers around £2 billion, or \$2.7 billion, a month.</p> <p>Tim Loughton, a Conservative member of Parliament, said the country had to “learn to live with Covid and not lock everything down and retreat until it goes away.” But, speaking before the announcement, he told the BBC that he had “slight apprehensions in that I think we still do need to have testing available widely, because I think that is the reassurance people can have that they’ve taken all possible precautions and they don’t want to infect other people.”</p>

	The health secretary, Sajid Javid, said earlier Monday that a second booster vaccination would be offered to adults 75 years and over, people living in care homes and those 12 years and older who suffer from conditions that suppress their immune systems.
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>02/21 Putin hints at wider military aims</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/21/world/europe/putin-ukraine-russia.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/21/world/europe/putin-ukraine-russia.html</a>
GIST	<p>MOSCOW — President Vladimir V. Putin on Monday ordered troops into separatist-held eastern Ukraine and hinted at the possibility of a wider military campaign, delivering an emotional and aggrieved address to his nation that laid claim to all of Ukraine as a country “created by Russia.”</p> <p>After the speech, state television showed Mr. Putin at the Kremlin signing decrees recognizing the so-called Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics, which were formed after Russia fomented a separatist war in eastern Ukraine in 2014. The decrees, published by the Kremlin, directed the Russian Defense Ministry to deploy troops in those regions to carry out “peacekeeping functions.”</p> <p>The action by Mr. Putin, who has commandeered the world’s attention with an enormous deployment of troops along Ukraine’s border in recent weeks, was the most blatant yet in a confrontation that Western officials warn could escalate into the biggest armed conflict in Europe since World War II.</p> <p>It was a momentous decision for Mr. Putin, a reversal of his eight-year-old strategy to use the separatist enclaves the Kremlin backed with arms and money as a means of pressuring Ukraine’s government without recognizing them outright as independent from Ukraine itself.</p> <p>But he continued to keep the world guessing about his next steps, signaling in his hourlong speech that his goals extended beyond the enclaves. He laid out such a broad case against Ukraine — describing its pro-Western government as a dire threat to Russia and to Russians — that he appeared to lay the groundwork for action against the rest of the country.</p> <p>He even went so far as to describe Ukraine’s elected pro-Western leaders as stooges and cast them as the aggressors — even though Russia has 190,000 troops, including allied separatist fighters, surrounding Ukraine.</p> <p>“As for those who captured and are holding onto power in Kyiv, we demand that they immediately cease military action,” Mr. Putin said at the end of his speech, referring to Ukraine’s capital. “If not, the complete responsibility for the possibility of a continuation of bloodshed will be fully and wholly on the conscience of the regime ruling the territory of Ukraine.”</p> <p>It was a thinly veiled threat against the government of President Volodymyr Zelensky, which denies that it is responsible for the escalating shelling on the front line between Ukrainian forces and Russian-backed separatists in recent days. Russian state television has broadcast extensive reports claiming, without evidence, that Ukraine is preparing an offensive against the separatist territories.</p> <p>After the speech, Mr. Zelensky spoke to President Biden and called a meeting of his Security and Defense Council, and later said Ukraine is “not afraid of anyone or anything.” The council’s secretary, Oleksiy Danilov, urged nervous Ukrainians not to trust rumors.</p> <p>“A great powerful information provocation is being waged against our state,” Mr. Danilov said. “But it is necessary to trust only official information.”</p> <p>The White House said Mr. Biden would impose sanctions against people doing business in the separatist regions, and that it would, possibly as soon as Tuesday, “announce additional measures related to today’s blatant violation of Russia’s international commitments.”</p>

The leaders of the European Union condemned the recognition “in the strongest possible terms,” and a spokesman for the secretary-general of the United Nations said the move was “inconsistent with the principles” of the U.N. charter.

“This is clearly a unilateral violation of Russia’s international commitments and an attack on the sovereignty of Ukraine,” said a statement from President Emmanuel Macron of France, who spoke to Mr. Putin at 1 a.m. Moscow time on Monday in a frantic bout of diplomacy aimed at resolving the crisis.

The United States and allied nations denounced Russia on Monday at an emergency U.N. Security Council meeting over the Ukraine crisis, calling Moscow’s recognition of the two separatist regions and the deployment of Russian troops to them a blunt defiance of international law that risks war.

The unusual late-evening meeting, requested by Ukraine, quickly turned into a diplomatic rebuke of Russia.

“Russia’s clear attack on Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity is unprovoked,” Linda Thomas-Greenfield, the American U.N. ambassador, said. Ridiculing Mr. Putin’s assertion that Russian forces had been deployed as peacekeepers, she said: “This is nonsense. We know what they really are.”

Mr. Putin’s recognition of the territories represents a sharp departure from how the Kremlin has approached Ukraine over the last eight years. After establishing the breakaway republics in 2014, the Kremlin decided not to recognize their independence even as it quietly backed them militarily and offered Russian citizenship to their residents.

The strategy, analysts said, was to use the unresolved conflict as a pressure point on Kyiv, which signed peace accords in Minsk in 2015 that required Ukraine to grant a special status to the eastern regions. The accords were never carried out, with their interpretation varying widely in Kyiv and Moscow, and Mr. Putin said on Monday that Ukraine had made clear “it planned to do nothing” to implement them.

“How long can this tragedy continue?” Mr. Putin asked, repeating his false claims that Ukraine was waging a “genocide” against Russian speakers in the region. “How long can we continue to bear this?”

Mr. Putin’s speech began with an extensive recitation of his historical grievances, starting with claims that Ukraine owes its statehood to the Soviet Union: “Modern-day Ukraine was in full and in whole created by Russia — Bolshevik, Communist Russia to be precise.”

They were arguments that Mr. Putin had made before, but he laid them out in his nationally televised address Monday evening with an intensity and, at times, anger that the president had rarely displayed in his 21 years in power.

“You want de-communization?” Mr. Putin went on, referring to Ukraine’s efforts to take down Lenin statues and other symbols of the Communist past. “We are ready to show you what real de-communization would mean for Ukraine.”

Not only was Ukraine rejecting its shared past with Russia, Mr. Putin went on, but it was enabling American ambitions to weaken Russia by aspiring to membership in the NATO alliance. He repeated his previous statements that the United States had the ability to base missiles in Ukraine that could hit Moscow within minutes; Mr. Biden denies such plans. Mr. Putin even claimed that Ukraine could develop nuclear weapons, raising the specter of “weapons of mass destruction” in the neighboring country.

“Why was it necessary to make an enemy out of us?” Mr. Putin said, repeating his long-held grievances about NATO’s eastward expansion. “They didn’t want such a large, independent country as Russia. In this lies the answer to all questions.”

Beyond Mr. Putin’s intensive history lesson — which would be disputed by many Ukrainians, who see themselves as a separate country with their own identity — the Russian president said little about his next

steps. For instance, he did not address that the separatist “people’s republics” are claiming about three times as much territory as they currently control.

Some analysts have speculated that Mr. Putin could use Russian troops to capture more Ukrainian territory on behalf of those republics. But his threat against Kyiv at the end of his speech signaled he was prepared to take the fight to Mr. Zelensky’s government directly. American officials have said such an outcome is possible given the size of Mr. Putin’s troop buildup to Ukraine’s north, east and south, estimated to be between 150,000 and 190,000 soldiers.

The recognition of the separatist statelets was reminiscent of a similar tactic Russia used in Georgia, which like Ukraine, was promised NATO membership in 2008 but without a fixed schedule. Breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia enticed Georgia to fight to restore its territory in 2008, and the regions beat back the Georgians with the aid of Russian troops. They declared independence and were recognized by Russia, which keeps troops in both statelets.

Mr. Putin’s Ukraine speech came after a carefully choreographed day of mounting drama over the fate of the country and its 44 million people. Russian state television offered extensive reports of Ukrainian shelling against civilian targets in the separatist regions, which Ukraine denied. The Russian military claimed it had killed five Ukrainian “saboteurs” who trespassed onto Russian territory.

“I emphasize once again that the Ukrainian army is not planning any offensive actions,” Ukraine’s defense minister, Oleksiy Reznikov, said in a news conference in Kyiv. “Nowhere. We stand for the return of our people and territories through political and diplomatic means.”

But Ukraine’s assurances appeared to be ignored in Moscow. Russian television broadcast videotaped appeals from the two leaders of the separatist republics pleading with Mr. Putin to recognize their enclaves’ independence.

The Kremlin then released more than an hour of footage of a special meeting of Mr. Putin’s Security Council, at which senior officials took turns explaining why the president should recognize the republics’ independence. Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin told Mr. Putin that the Finance Ministry and Central Bank were ready to manage the impact of any Western sanctions.

“These risks have been worked through rather well,” Mr. Mishustin said.

Some officials told Mr. Putin that he should go further, raising the possibility that the Kremlin was considering more extensive action. Speaking last, Viktor V. Zolotov, Mr. Putin’s former bodyguard and the head of Russia’s National Guard, hinted that the Kremlin needed control of more than just Ukraine’s eastern regions to eliminate what it considers the threat posed by the country’s pro-Western shift.

“We don’t have a border with Ukraine — we have a border with America, because they are the masters in that country,” Mr. Zolotov said. “Of course we must recognize the republics, but I want to say that we must go farther in order to defend our country.”

“A decision will be made today,” Mr. Putin said at the end of that meeting, keeping his nation and the world in suspense until his televised speech hours later.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	02/21 Trucker convoys to shutter Capital beltway
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/feb/21/trucker-convoys-intend-shut-down-capital-beltway-o/">https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/feb/21/trucker-convoys-intend-shut-down-capital-beltway-o/</a>
GIST	<p>One of the organizers of the trucker convoys headed for Washington this week says that one of their goals is to shut down the Beltway.</p> <p>“We will be along the Beltway where the Beltway will be shut down,” Bob Bolus told a Washington TV station Sunday.</p>



In an interview with WTTG Fox-5, Mr. Bolus said the goal would be to paralyze America's capital like a giant snake, in the manner that Canadian truckers had paralyzed Ottawa in recent weeks.

"I'll give you an analogy of that of a giant boa constrictor," he said. "That basically squeezes you, chokes you and it swallows you, and that's what we're going to do the D.C."

Mr. Bolus was uncertain how many trucks will be part of the convoy, but told the Washington Fox affiliate that he had heard interest from hundreds of people.

The trucker said that accommodations would be made for emergency vehicles.

"There will be a lane open for emergency vehicles, they'll be able to get in and out and all that," he said. "We will not compromise anybody's safety or health, one way or the other."

But he was more sanguine about other potential impacts from shutting down the Beltway.

"As far as if they can't get to work, geez that's too bad," he said.

Mr. Bolus told Fox-5 that he does not plan to be arrested.

State police in Maryland and Virginia, who monitor the iconic freeway that surrounds Washington, D.C., without ever touching it, told the Fox station that they are aware of the plans and are monitoring the situation under standard practices for protests.

"Police sources say there have been challenges in D.C. to find towing companies willing to work with law enforcement," Fox-5 wrote.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	<b>02/21 Wary: fast-moving offshoot of omicron</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/feb/21/disease-trackers-wary-fast-moving-offshoot-omicron/">https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/feb/21/disease-trackers-wary-fast-moving-offshoot-omicron/</a>
GIST	<p>Scientists are warily watching a new, faster version of omicron even as the winter spike of the coronavirus subsides and states and cities rush to relax rules and fully reopen.</p> <p>The BA.2 variant seems to spread about 30% quicker than the initial omicron variant, overtaking it in South Africa while causing a second winter surge in Denmark.</p> <p>The subvariant accounts for only 4% of sampled cases in the U.S., according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, though its proportion doubled over the first two weeks of February. It might continue to gain speed and evade available treatments.</p> <p>Scientists are hopeful there is enough immunity in American society that if BA.2 does cause trouble, it merely prolongs the tail end of the omicron surge instead of creating a new crisis.</p> <p>Booster shots seem to offer as much protection against BA.2 as they did against the first form of omicron. Still, the country is trying to avoid any setback as the country records over 100,000 infections and 2,000 deaths per day on the back end of the omicron surge that spread far and wide.</p> <p>"Another 'spike' is unlikely in my view. However, it does mean we can expect more infections over the next few months than would have been the case. They might make a difference in any smaller communities that have somehow evaded large outbreaks so far, and are poorly vaccinated," said Bill Hanage, associate professor of epidemiology at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health.</p> <p>Scientists are trying to learn more about the new variant, including exactly how much more contagious it is than the initial version of omicron — something that can be difficult to measure given varying immunity levels in different parts of the world.</p>

The new variant “appears more fit, as shown by its takeover in many places,” Dr. Hanage said. “However it has mysteriously failed to do so in the U.S. until recently. When looking at the increasing proportions of BA.2 remember that this is an increasing proportion of a smaller number, as case counts are rapidly declining.”

There are some worrying signs, however.

One preprint study suggested BA.2 is resistant to sotrovimab, the monoclonal antibody drug from GlaxoSmithKline and Vir Biotechnology that had been the most effective against the first omicron variant.

“Omicron BA.2 is not neutralized with detectable titer by any of the therapeutic monoclonal antibodies, including sotrovimab,” researchers from the NYU Grossman School of Medicine said in the study, which hasn’t been peer-reviewed.

Vir Biotechnology said its own data based on lab studies contest those findings.

“We note recent conclusions from another lab, which state that no approved or authorized monoclonal antibodies for treatment retain activity against all subvariants of omicron,” Vir CEO George Scangos said.

He said based on lab experiments with a harmless pseudovirus, “we believe that the 500 mg dose of sotrovimab is sufficient to retain activity against the BA.2 variant, just as it has against all other variants of concern and interest.”

Another preprint study from Japan suggested the new variant was more severe in hamsters than the original omicron.

Scientists are trying to understand whether the hamsters serve as a suitable model for humans, however, and a separate review of South African hospitalizations suggested BA.2 wasn’t causing worse disease than the original form of omicron, or BA.1.

“These data suggest that while BA.2 may have a competitive advantage over BA.1 in some settings, the clinical profile of illness remains similar,” they wrote.

Some doctors say the U.S. is prepared to deal with the omicron spinoff as leaders rush to lift mandates and try to pivot to the endemic phase of the disease.

Panagis Galiatsatos, assistant professor at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine in Baltimore, said the initial omicron wave was fueled by holiday gatherings at a time when the vaccine’s immunity was falling and booster uptake remained low.

“I’m not convinced it’ll cause a lethal spike that omicron did in the winter,” he said. “With now boosters in place and no significant gatherings, I don’t expect it to cause a wave of hospitalizations.”

William Schaffner, an infectious diseases specialist at Vanderbilt University, said there is no need to panic or create a new vaccine but BA.2 might “stretch out the endgame” of the pandemic phase, especially as the U.S. relaxes its COVID-19 protocols because of declining case rates.

“I think there’s been a chorus of those in infectious health who’ve said, ‘Don’t go so fast. Take it easy, let this reduction in cases be more sustained.’ But there is obviously a great deal of pressure, particularly in the school situation, to remove the masks and try to return at least that part of our society to something closer to normal,” Dr. Schaffner said. “This may indeed prolong our transition from pandemic into endemic but so far, so good. Everyone has their fingers and maybe their toes crossed, hoping we’ll continue on this path.”

HEADLINE	<b>02/22 UK barrage of sanctions to hit Russia hard</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/22/boris-johnson-to-announce-barrage-of-uk-sanctions-against-russia">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/22/boris-johnson-to-announce-barrage-of-uk-sanctions-against-russia</a>
GIST	<p>The “first barrage of UK economic sanctions against Russia” will be announced on Tuesday, <a href="#">Boris Johnson</a> said, as one of his senior cabinet ministers said the Russian “invasion of Ukraine has begun”.</p> <p>Speaking after a 6.30am Cobra meeting, Johnson said the Kremlin was bent on a “full-scale invasion of Ukraine” and said the UK’s sanctions would hit the “economic interests that have been supporting Russia’s war machine”, a suggestion the UK was prepared to continue ratcheting up measures.</p> <p>“They will hit <a href="#">Russia</a> very hard and there is a lot more that we are going to do in the event of an invasion. Be in no doubt that if Russian companies are prevented from raising capital on the UK financial markets, if we unpeel the facade of Russian ownership of companies, of property, it will start to hurt.”</p> <p>Sajid Javid, the health secretary, said he would agree that the threat posed by Russia’s action was on a par with <a href="#">the 1962 Cuban missile crisis</a>. “It’s a violation of international law, and we and Nato will not accept it,” he told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme.</p> <p>Johnson convened the 6.30am meeting as Vladimir Putin <a href="#">ordered troops over the Ukrainian border</a> into territories in the east of the country, where Russian troops already have significant presence. A statement to MPs is expected later on Tuesday.</p> <p>Earlier, Putin had recognised what he termed the independence of Russia-controlled eastern Ukraine areas of Donetsk and Luhansk, in defiance of international agreements and ordered in forces under the guise of “peacekeeping”.</p> <p>Both the US and UK believe that the Russian entry into eastern Ukraine is a precursor for a more sweeping invasion, though the US has not yet used the term to describe the latest troop movements. The EU’s foreign affairs representative said the bloc did not consider a “fully fledged invasion” had occurred.</p> <p>But Javid took a stronger line on Tuesday morning, telling Sky News: “We have seen that he has recognised these breakaway eastern regions in Ukraine and from the reports we can already tell that he has sent in tanks and troops. From that you can conclude that the invasion of Ukraine has begun.”</p> <p>Overnight, Johnson spoke to the Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskiy, telling him he would explore sending further defensive support to Ukraine, at the request of the Ukrainian government.</p> <p>The Cobra meeting follows an emergency session of the UN security council where the UK’s ambassador, Dame Barbara Woodward, said Russia had “brought us to the brink”, warning that the country’s actions “will have severe and far-reaching consequences”.</p> <p>She said an invasion would unleash “the forces of war, death and destruction” on the people of Ukraine. “The humanitarian impact will be terrible on civilians fleeing the fighting. We know that women and children will suffer most.”</p> <p>She said the security council must be united in calling on Russia to “de-escalate immediately”, as well as “condemning aggression against a sovereign nation and defending the territorial integrity of Ukraine”.</p> <p>The EU’s foreign affairs high representative, Josep Borrell, will also convene an extraordinary meeting on Tuesday, in which EU foreign ministers will adopt sanctions against Russia over its recognition of Ukrainian separatist regions. “I’m sure there will be a unanimous decision”, he said.</p>

	However, there are differences in opinion within the EU as to the strength of the package that will be imposed on Russia at this stage, with Borrell suggesting that Russia had not, as yet, launched a “fully fledged” invasion although its troops were on Ukrainian soil.
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>02/21 Ukraine ‘attacks’ by Russia ‘fake factory’</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/21/dumb-and-lazy-the-flawed-films-of-ukrainian-attacks-made-by-russias-fake-factory">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/21/dumb-and-lazy-the-flawed-films-of-ukrainian-attacks-made-by-russias-fake-factory</a>
GIST	<p>The video shows a ghostly scene. A night-time battle is taking place in a forest. There are flashes and mysterious bangs. An unidentified figure cries out in pain. The wounded man is wearing a helmet. Otherwise there are few clues as to where the footage was shot, or what exactly is going on.</p> <p>A <a href="#">TV report by Russia’s state-run channel one</a> gave the answer. The man seen in eerie silhouette was a Ukrainian saboteur, it said. He was part of a diversionary team sent across enemy lines into pro-Russian separatist territory. His mission? To blow up a local chlorine plant in the rebel-held town of Horlivka, the channel said.</p> <p>During the firefight two infiltrators were killed, it added. By happy coincidence, representatives of the Donetsk People’s Republic – one of two pro-Moscow entities in the east of <a href="#">Ukraine</a> – retrieved the video from the wounded man’s head camera. He had chucked it away, channel one told its viewers.</p> <p>There was only one problem with the Kremlin’s dramatic account of the incident. It was entirely fake. The soundtrack of shooting and explosions was actually more than a decade old. It had been recorded in April 2010, <a href="#">according to open source researchers</a>, during a Finnish military exercise.</p> <p>Ukraine’s intelligence service believes the video is the work of the GRU, Russia’s military spy agency, which has worked actively in Ukraine since the 2014 annexation of Crimea and the shooting down of the MH17 passenger plane. The film’s creators appear to have lifted the original Finnish video from the internet.</p> <p>They spliced its sound track on to <a href="#">new video content made two weeks ago</a> – editing out a few excited “ooohs” from Finnish recruits.</p> <p>“Russia has a long record of doing this. It isn’t surprising,” <a href="#">Elliot Higgins</a>, founder of the investigative website Bellingcat told the Guardian. He added: “What’s surprising is they haven’t got any better at doing it. In some ways they have got worse. It’s really dumb and lazy.”</p> <p>Higgins said international audiences were mostly impervious to Kremlin disinformation. But he said domestic Russian viewers tended to believe fake TV footage, which was “theatrically” created for state propaganda purposes. This was especially true of the older generation, he said.</p> <p>Over the past week Russia has churned out numerous false stories from what Ukraine’s foreign ministry Dmytro Kuleba called a “fake producing factory”. They include claims Ukraine is planning to attack separatist enclaves, and that it on Monday smuggled armoured vehicles and saboteurs across the border – <a href="#">supposedly recorded by helmet cam</a>.</p> <p>The Kremlin’s media goal is to create a pretext for invasion, Higgins suggested. As part of this strategy Russian TV has begun actively promoting information which suggests a vast humanitarian crisis is unfolding in eastern Ukraine. It has claimed residents have come under heavy Ukrainian shelling – something Kyiv says is not true.</p> <p>The information has ranged from reports on increased bombardment to more outlandish “provocations,” such as attempted car bombing on Friday outside the separatist administration building in Donetsk. The same day the territory’s pro-Moscow leader, Denis Pushilin, <a href="#">released a video</a> saying the situation had become so grave civilians had to be bussed out to safety and Russia.</p>

Pushilin's evacuation order was released on 18 February. Bellingcat, however, discovered from the video's meta-data on the channel Telegram that it had actually been filmed two days earlier – last Wednesday. "It's incompetence," Higgins said. At the time the situation across the line of control between the Ukrainian military and separatists positions was calm.

A large part of Russian efforts to lay the groundwork for a Kosovo-style intervention in east Ukraine is to claim that the Ukrainian efforts to regain control of the territories in 2014 amounted to "genocide". Putin has used the word on several occasions. He has also made comparisons to the massacre at Srebrenica in Bosnia.

"What is happening in the Donbas today is genocide," Putin said last week. Russian diplomats circulated a document at the United Nations claiming Ukraine is engaged in "exterminating the civilian population" in the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine. Late on Sunday night Russia's embassy in Washington sent a similar document to US journalists.

The "genocide" theme was also repeatedly mentioned during Putin's extraordinary security council meeting on Monday in Moscow. It has featured extensively in state media bulletins, leading up to the request by the separatist authorities for [military and economic help from the Kremlin](#), as well as legal recognition, granted by Putin on Monday evening.

In 2014, during the peak of the conflict, numerous mass burials were carried out, particularly in Luhansk, where the bodies of many of those who died in the war could not be buried immediately due to the intense fighting. During a visit to Luhansk in September 2014, [the Guardian saw stacks of simple wooden coffins at the morgue](#), which were later buried in hastily dug mass graves.

However, to describe the deaths in Luhansk and other parts of the current separatist areas as "genocide" is grossly misleading. Both sides used artillery on civilian areas during the gruesome battles of 2014, but there was never any mass programme to execute civilians based on ethnicity, language or political preference.

Starting last summer, separatist authorities began exhuming bodies from graves, to perform DNA analysis and identify the remains of people they said had been "victims of Ukrainian aggression". At the time, the move caused alarm among some of those monitoring the region, with a sense that the exhumations might be later used politically. Now, that seems to be happening.

Meanwhile, top Russian propagandists have openly accused western leaders of warmongering. In a recent segment, Dmitry Kiselyov, who runs a primetime weekly news show, asked "who needs war?" The answer was a list of foreign leaders and dignitaries: Boris Johnson, Prince Andrew, Joe Biden, Recep Erdoğan, Emmanuel Macron and Volodymyr Zelenskiy, Ukraine's embattled pro-western president.

For some pro-Kremlin opinion-makers, the turn toward war has been marked by a quick change in message. Margarita Simonyan, the head of RT, spent weeks mocking US and European officials for their warnings that Russia was preparing for war. But early last week, she changed her opinion: "Russia cannot but stop this war. What are we waiting for?" she asked.

The video editing technology may be new, but the message is an old one. [Finnish media pointed out](#) that the Soviet Union in November 1939 used a similar excuse to start the winter war against Finland. The day before the Soviet invasion Moscow claimed that Finnish troops had launched "an attack".

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	02/21 US nears return Iran nuclear deal
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-nears-return-to-iran-nuclear-deal-11645458466?mod=lead_feature_below_a_pos1">https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-nears-return-to-iran-nuclear-deal-11645458466?mod=lead_feature_below_a_pos1</a>

## GIST

Iran, the U.S. and other world powers are nearing a deal to revive the 2015 nuclear accord, although negotiators are still wrangling over significant final demands from Tehran, including the scope of sanctions relief.

An agreement could be finalized in Vienna within the next couple of days, said officials involved in the talks. President Biden has made restoring the agreement a top foreign-policy goal. The White House views an agreement restraining Iran's nuclear program as key to Middle East stability, allowing the U.S. to [focus on China and Russia](#).

An agreement would set out the steps Iran and the U.S. must take to return to compliance with the 2015 deal, which imposed tight but temporary limits on Iran's nuclear program in exchange for suspending international sanctions. The U.S. [pulled out of the deal in May 2018](#) and reimposed sweeping sanctions on Iran, which brought most international trade with Iran to a standstill.

While the terms of a restored deal would be almost identical to the 2015 pact, Iran's "breakout time"—the duration needed to amass enough nuclear fuel for a bomb—could fall to as low as six months, down from about a year in the original deal, U.S. officials say. That is because of expertise that Iran has gained through its nuclear work since the U.S. exited the agreement.

Any deal would likely need final signoff by the leaders of the countries involved: the U.S., the U.K., France, Germany, Russia, China and Iran. Among the most important unresolved issues is how many U.S. sanctions will be lifted, including those on the office of Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps.

"The U.S. must prove its will to lift major sanctions," Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi said Monday.

U.S. and European officials have indicated that they want a deal by the end of February, because of advances in Iran's nuclear work. Western diplomats have warned they could leave the negotiating table in coming days if an agreement isn't within reach.

"The Iranian leadership now has a choice. This is the moment of truth," German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said Saturday at the Munich Security Conference.

Iranian foreign-ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said Monday that "the remaining issues are...the most difficult, serious and key ones."

White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki said Friday that negotiations had progressed substantially, "but nothing is agreed to until everything is agreed."

Negotiations began last April, nearly three years after then-President [Donald Trump](#) withdrew the U.S. from the nuclear deal in 2018, saying the pact gave Iran too much for too little in return.

Biden administration officials have said they hope that a restored deal could provide a platform for follow-up talks about Iran's missile program and the network of militias that it supports throughout the Middle East. Iran, which says its nuclear work is for entirely peaceful purposes, has repeatedly said it has no interest in further talks.

Concerns about the talks have [grown in Washington in recent weeks](#), including among some Democrats.

Iran has accrued nuclear expertise over the past two years, including its deployment of advanced centrifuges that can produce nuclear fuel more quickly, reducing its breakout time. That window could shrink further after 2026, when some of the nuclear deal's restrictions expire. Strict limits on the size of Iran's stockpile of nuclear fuel remain until 2031, and broad monitoring of its nuclear work will continue well beyond then.



Since the U.S. exit, Iran has massively expanded its nuclear work, including producing highly enriched uranium. It is currently within a few weeks of being able to amass enough nuclear fuel for a bomb, officials say.

The original pact wasn't put forward for congressional approval as a treaty. However, Republicans are pressing for an in-depth congressional review of any agreement that restores the deal. That could lead to a vote in the Senate, but it would require a two-thirds majority to override a presidential veto of a resolution of disapproval.

People involved in the talks say a revival of the deal would require several months to fully prepare, with the Biden administration needing to unwind hefty sanctions imposed on Iran since the Trump administration's pullout.

Iran would also have to downgrade several tons of enriched uranium, or send it abroad, and uninstall hundreds of advanced centrifuges from its nuclear sites. The United Nations atomic agency would have to parse through footage and other material from its nuclear-monitoring activities that Tehran hasn't given the agency access to over the last 12 months.

U.S. oil sanctions are likely to be fully lifted only once Iran has taken the steps needed to scale back its nuclear work, people close to the talks say. That means a wait of several months before Iranian oil exports can fully re-enter international markets and Western companies can begin discussing future deals with Tehran.

Iran has at least \$30 billion in oil revenue trapped overseas by sanctions, and receiving some of the trapped funds could trigger an [exchange of Western and Iranian prisoners](#).

Negotiations are coming down to key sanctions listings that Iran wants removed. That includes the Foreign Terrorist Organizations listing for Iran's Revolutionary Guards, and how broad the easing of sanctions will be on Mr. Khamenei and his top officials.

U.S. officials have said previously that hundreds of Iranian people and entities would remain under sanctions for terrorism, human-rights and other nonnuclear reasons. Iran has called for all sanctions imposed by the Trump administration to be lifted.

Tehran is also seeking stronger guarantee that the U.S. won't again quit the deal. Mr. Biden has said the U.S. would stay in the agreement if Iran complies, and the text offers some assurances to help Iran reap its economic benefits. But the U.S. says no legal guarantee about the actions of future American administrations are possible.

Iran is pushing for the U.N. atomic agency to drop or soon close a probe it launched in 2018 over nuclear material found in Tehran. The investigation centers on nuclear-weapons work many Western governments believe Iran conducted in the past that could shed light on how close the country came to mastering the skills needed to build a weapon.

On Sunday, Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz urged the U.S. and its partners to ensure the probe continued. He also urged them to make sure that if a deal is restored, atomic-agency inspectors have broad scope to follow up on any suspect activity by Iran.

The Israeli government has sought to avoid a public fight with the Biden administration over its efforts to restore the nuclear deal, but top Israeli officials remain critical of the agreement.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	02/21 Inflation starts to show up in Asia
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/inflation-creeps-into-asiamy-salary-is-the-same-but-everything-is-more-expensive-11645448452?mod=lead_feature_below_a_pos1">https://www.wsj.com/articles/inflation-creeps-into-asiamy-salary-is-the-same-but-everything-is-more-expensive-11645448452?mod=lead_feature_below_a_pos1</a>

HONG KONG—Early warning signs of inflation are appearing in some parts of Asia, as higher energy and food prices start to bite in countries that recently seemed immune to cost pressures.

India's inflation accelerated to 6% in January, well above the trend of around 3.6% in the three years leading up to the Covid-19 pandemic, while Sri Lanka's inflation hit 14.2% that month, the highest in more than a decade. In South Korea, core consumer inflation recently rose to 3%, its highest level since January 2012.

Thailand's consumer price inflation is now 3.2%—after averaging less than 1% in the three years leading up to 2020—even though the tourism-reliant country has one of Asia's weakest economies. Angry truck drivers recently clogged streets in Bangkok to pressure the government to lower diesel prices.

Some families say they are switching over to crocodile meat as an outbreak of African swine fever pushes pork costs higher.

“My salary is still the same, but everything is more expensive, not only pork, but vegetables and eggs,” said Butsakon Phadoem, 25 years old. She said she has stopped adding meat and vegetables to her noodles some of the time to cut costs.

Inflation across most of Asia is still well below levels seen in some western economies, including the U.S., where consumer prices rose 7.5% from a year earlier in January, a four-decade high.

Consumer price pressures are particularly weak in China, despite recent cost increases for factories. While industrial inflation remains high in China, it has eased recently and factories have struggled to pass expenses on to consumers as the broader economy struggles to recover from a property market slowdown and other problems. Consumer inflation inched up just 0.9% in January from a year earlier, down from December's 1.5% gain. It is widely expected to stay below 3% this year.

Most Asian economies still have excess labor capacity, unlike the U.S., as many taxi drivers, hotel and restaurant workers have yet to find full-time employment after losing work during the pandemic.

China and some other economies in Asia are also struggling with weak growth in consumer demand, in part due to recurring Covid-19 restrictions and the fact that most governments didn't roll out big-ticket stimulus packages like the U.S. did.

But many Asian nations, including South Korea, India and Thailand, are also major importers of energy or food, which have become more costly.

[Food prices globally rose 28.1% in 2021](#), according to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. After doubling in price during 2021, U.S. West Texas Intermediate crude futures have climbed another 20% this year to around \$91 per barrel.

Some economists believe oil prices could breach \$100 per barrel this year, especially [if there is a Russian invasion of Ukraine](#). If so, it would potentially hurt emerging markets more than advanced economies, Goldman Sachs analysts said, since energy costs make up a larger percentage of consumer budgets in the developing world.

Singapore, South Korea and Indonesia are among the Asian countries that have begun tightening monetary policy to [curb rising housing prices](#) and other cost pressures, even as [China eases credit conditions](#) to reignite growth.

Even if Asia's price pressures remain lower than those in the U.S., most central banks in the region—with the exception of China—may be forced to “sacrifice economic growth to some extent in order to contain the expectation of inflation” this year, said Zhou Hao, a Singapore-based economist at [Commerzbank](#) AG.

India's central bank earlier this month held its key lending rates steady. Reserve Bank of India Gov. Shaktikanta Das said inflation—led by a surge in vegetable and edible oil costs—is expected to ease in the coming months, though the oil-price increase needs to be “closely monitored.”

Central banks in Thailand and the Philippines also recently refrained from raising rates. But the Philippine central bank raised its inflation forecast to 3.7% in 2022—from 3.4% previously—citing higher oil prices and food supply shortages. Thailand's central bank warned that inflation this year could be “higher than previously assessed” and “exceed the target range” during the first half of 2022.

Apichart Prairungruang, chairman of the Land Transport Federation of Thailand, said in an interview earlier this week that truck owners have been operating at a loss for months because of high diesel prices, with more than 100 trucks seized by lenders. Truckers called on the government to lower fuel excise taxes to help restore profitability.

“We understand the world's situation” with rising fuel prices, he said. But “if the government can't do anything about this, we have to increase our transportation fees by up to 15% to 20%,” which will eventually flow to households, he said.

On Tuesday, Thailand's cabinet agreed to a temporary cut of the diesel tax, for three months.

In Nakhon Pathom, near Bangkok, a local eatery called the Grilled Pork Buffet Restaurant was offering barbecue pork with vegetables, ice cream and a drink for the equivalent of about \$4.50 per person. But after pork prices rose by around 60% amid a production drop due to swine fever and extreme weather, the owner, Pattanachat Ngamsanga, said she could no longer earn a profit.

She started offering cheaper crocodile meat, which she says tastes like pork but is softer. The first day, the crocodile meat sold out, so she started offering more.

“Our customers love it,” she said. “Crocodile meat has really saved my life.”

Many economists still believe Asia will be able to keep significantly higher consumer inflation at bay, given how weak consumption growth is lingering in many countries. Meanwhile, supply shocks that continue to haunt most developed economies in the West, including port congestion and skyrocketing shipping costs, haven't affected Asia as much.

That means Asian countries can be more “relaxed and lenient” in tightening policy than some other countries, including the U.S., which is expected to raise interest rates as early as March, according to Aidan Yao, senior emerging Asia economist at AXA Investment Managers—though he says Asian central banks will have to tighten more eventually.

Labor shortages have appeared in some places, often due to Covid-19 lockdown measures, which reduced the flow of migrant factory workers in some countries. But it isn't clear whether those problems will be long-lasting, with labor still more widely available than in the U.S.

Feng Xiang, who runs a coal mine with hundreds of employees in Indonesia, said miner wages have risen by at least 10% since the second half of last year, while higher oil prices have added to overall costs.

Still, he expects wage increases to be limited to energy-related sectors, while workers in service industries like hotels and restaurants continue to receive lower incomes.

“I believe the mining industry is a rare exception in seeing wage inflation,” Mr. Feng said.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	02/20 CDC not publishing all Covid data collected
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/20/health/covid-cdc-data.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/20/health/covid-cdc-data.html</a>

## GIST

For more than a year, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has collected data on hospitalizations for Covid-19 in the United States and broken it down by age, race and vaccination status. But it has not made most of the information public.

When the C.D.C. published the first significant data on the effectiveness of boosters in adults younger than 65 two weeks ago, it [left out the numbers for a huge portion of that population](#): 18- to 49-year-olds, the group least likely to benefit from extra shots, because the first two doses already left them well-protected.

The agency recently debuted a dashboard of [wastewater data](#) on its website that will be updated daily and might provide early signals of an oncoming surge of Covid cases. Some states and localities had been sharing wastewater information with the agency since the start of the pandemic, but it had never before released those findings.

Two full years into the pandemic, the agency leading the country's response to the public health emergency has published only a tiny fraction of the data it has collected, several people familiar with the data said.

Much of the withheld information could help state and local health officials better target their efforts to bring the virus under control. Detailed, timely data on hospitalizations by age and race would help health officials identify and help the populations at highest risk. Information on hospitalizations and death by age and vaccination status would have helped inform whether healthy adults needed booster shots. And wastewater surveillance across the nation would spot outbreaks and emerging variants early.

Without the booster data for 18- to 49-year-olds, the outside experts whom federal health agencies look to for advice had to rely on numbers from Israel to make their recommendations on the shots.

Kristen Nordlund, a spokeswoman for the C.D.C., said the agency has been slow to release the different streams of data "because basically, at the end of the day, it's not yet ready for prime time." She said the agency's "priority when gathering any data is to ensure that it's accurate and actionable."

Another reason is fear that the information might be misinterpreted, Ms. Nordlund said.

Dr. Daniel Jernigan, the agency's deputy director for public health science and surveillance said the pandemic exposed the fact that data systems at the C.D.C., and at the state levels, are outmoded and not up to handling large volumes of data. C.D.C. scientists are trying to modernize the systems, he said.

"We want better, faster data that can lead to decision making and actions at all levels of public health, that can help us eliminate the lag in data that has held us back," he added.

The C.D.C. also has multiple bureaucratic divisions that must sign off on important publications, and its officials must alert the Department of Health and Human Services — which oversees the agency — and the White House of their plans. The agency often shares data with states and partners before making data public. Those steps can add delays.

"The C.D.C. is a political organization as much as it is a public health organization," said Samuel Scarpino, managing director of pathogen surveillance at the Rockefeller Foundation's Pandemic Prevention Institute. "The steps that it takes to get something like this released are often well outside of the control of many of the scientists that work at the C.D.C."

The performance of vaccines and boosters, particularly in younger adults, is among the most glaring omissions in data the C.D.C. has made public.

Last year, the agency repeatedly came under fire for [not tracking so-called breakthrough infections](#) in vaccinated Americans, and focusing only on individuals who became ill enough to be hospitalized or die. The agency presented that information as risk comparisons with unvaccinated adults, rather than provide timely snapshots of hospitalized patients stratified by age, sex, race and vaccination status.

But the C.D.C. has been routinely collecting information since the Covid vaccines were first rolled out last year, according to a federal official familiar with the effort. The agency has been reluctant to make those figures public, the official said, because they might be misinterpreted as the vaccines being ineffective.

Ms. Nordlund confirmed that as one of the reasons. Another reason, she said, is that the data represents only 10 percent of the population of the United States. But the C.D.C. has relied on the same level of sampling to track influenza for years.

Some outside public health experts were stunned to hear that information exists.

“We have been begging for that sort of granularity of data for two years,” said Jessica Malaty Rivera, an epidemiologist and part of the team that ran Covid Tracking Project, an independent effort that compiled data on the pandemic till March 2021.

A detailed analysis, she said, “builds public trust, and it paints a much clearer picture of what’s actually going on.”

Concern about the misinterpretation of hospitalization data broken down by vaccination status is not unique to the C.D.C. On Thursday, public health officials in Scotland said they would stop releasing data on Covid hospitalizations and deaths by vaccination status because of similar fears that the figures would be misrepresented by anti-vaccine groups.

But the experts dismissed the potential misuse or misinterpretation of data as an acceptable reason for not releasing it.

“We are at a much greater risk of misinterpreting the data with data vacuums, than sharing the data with proper science, communication and caveats,” Ms. Rivera said.

When the Delta variant caused an outbreak in Massachusetts last summer, the fact that three-quarters of those infected were vaccinated led people to mistakenly conclude that the vaccines were powerless against the virus — validating the C.D.C.’s concerns.

But that could have been avoided if the agency had educated the public from the start that as more people are vaccinated, the percentage of vaccinated people who are infected or hospitalized would also rise, public health experts said.

“Tell the truth, present the data,” said Dr. Paul Offit, a vaccine expert and adviser to the Food and Drug Administration. “I have to believe that there is a way to explain these things so people can understand it.”

Knowing which groups of people were being hospitalized in the United States, which other conditions those patients may have had and how vaccines changed the picture over time would have been invaluable, Dr. Offit said.

Relying on Israeli data to make booster recommendations for Americans was less than ideal, Dr. Offit noted. Israel defines severe disease differently than the United States, among other factors.

“There’s no reason that they should be better at collecting and putting forth data than we were,” Dr. Offit said of Israeli scientists. “The C.D.C. is the principal epidemiological agency in this country, and so you would like to think the data came from them.”

It has also been difficult to find C.D.C. data on the proportion of children hospitalized for Covid who have other medical conditions, said Dr. Yvonne Maldonado, chair of the American Academy of Pediatrics’s Committee on Infectious Diseases.

The academy's staff asked their partners at the C.D.C. for that information on a call in December, according to a spokeswoman for the A.A.P., and were told it was unavailable.

Ms. Nordlund pointed to data on the agency's website that includes this information, and to multiple published reports on pediatric hospitalizations with information on children who have other health conditions.

The pediatrics academy has repeatedly asked the C.D.C. for an estimate on the contagiousness of a person infected with the coronavirus five days after symptoms begin — but Dr. Maldonado finally got the answer from [an article in The New York Times](#) in December.

"They've known this for over a year and a half, right, and they haven't told us," she said. "I mean, you can't find out anything from them."

Experts in wastewater analysis were more understanding of the C.D.C.'s slow pace of making that data public. The C.D.C. has been building the wastewater system since September 2020, and the capacity to present the data over the past few months, Ms. Nordlund said. In the meantime, the C.D.C.'s state partners have had access to the data, she said.

Despite the cautious preparation, the C.D.C. released the wastewater data a week later than planned. The Covid Data Tracker is updated only on Thursdays, and the day before the original release date, the scientists who manage the tracker realized they needed more time to integrate the data.

"It wasn't because the data wasn't ready, it was because the systems and how it physically displayed on the page wasn't working the way that they wanted it to," Ms. Nordlund said.

The C.D.C. has received more than \$1 billion to modernize its systems, which may help pick up the pace, Ms. Nordlund said. "We're working on that," she said.

The agency's [public dashboard](#) now has data from 31 states. Eight of those states, including Utah, began sending their figures to the C.D.C. in the fall of 2020. Some relied on scientists volunteering their expertise; others paid private companies. But many others, such as Mississippi, New Mexico and North Dakota, have yet to begin tracking wastewater.

Utah's fledgling program in April 2020 has now grown to cover 88 percent of the state's population, with samples being collected twice a week, according to Nathan LaCross, who manages Utah's wastewater surveillance program.

Wastewater data reflects the presence of the virus in an entire community, so it is not plagued by the privacy concerns attached to medical information that would normally complicate data release, experts said.

"There are a bunch of very important and substantive legal and ethical challenges that don't exist for wastewater data," Dr. Scarpino said. "That lowered bar should certainly mean that data could flow faster."

Tracking wastewater can help identify areas experiencing a high burden of cases early, Dr. LaCross said. That allows officials to better allocate resources like mobile testing teams and testing sites.

Wastewater is also a much faster and more reliable barometer of the spread of the virus than the number of cases or positive tests. Well before the nation became aware of the Delta variant, for example, scientists who track wastewater had seen its rise and alerted the C.D.C., Dr. Scarpino said. They did so in early May, just before the agency famously said vaccinated people could take off their masks.

Even now, the agency is relying on a technique that captures the amount of virus, but not the different variants in the mix, said Mariana Matus, chief executive officer of BioBot Analytics, which specializes in



	<p>wastewater analysis. That will make it difficult for the agency to spot and respond to outbreaks of new variants in a timely manner, she said.</p> <p>“It gets really exhausting when you see the private sector working faster than the premier public health agency of the world,” Ms. Rivera said.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>02/21 Studies: 4<sup>th</sup> shot not needed perhaps years</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/21/health/covid-vaccine-antibodies-t-cells.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/21/health/covid-vaccine-antibodies-t-cells.html</a>
GIST	<p>As people across the world grapple with the prospect of living with the coronavirus for the foreseeable future, one question looms large: How soon before they need yet another shot?</p> <p>Not for many months, and perhaps not for years, according to a flurry of new studies.</p> <p>Three doses of a Covid vaccine — or even just two — are enough to protect most people from serious illness and death for a long time, the studies suggest.</p> <p>“We’re starting to see now diminishing returns on the number of additional doses,” said John Wherry, director of the Institute for immunology at the University of Pennsylvania. Although people over 65 or at high risk of illness may benefit from a fourth vaccine dose, it may be unnecessary for most people, he added.</p> <p>Federal health officials have said <a href="#">they are not planning</a> to recommend fourth doses anytime soon.</p> <p>The Omicron variant can dodge antibodies — immune molecules that prevent the virus from infecting cells — produced after two doses of a Covid vaccine. But a third shot of the mRNA vaccines made by Pfizer-BioNTech or by Moderna prompts the body to make a much wider variety of antibodies, which would be difficult for any variant of the virus to evade, according to the <a href="#">most recent study</a>, posted online on Tuesday.</p> <p>The diverse repertoire of antibodies produced should be able to protect people from new variants, even those that differ significantly from the original version of the virus, the study suggests.</p> <p>“If people are exposed to another variant like Omicron, they now got some extra ammunition to fight it,” said Dr. Julie McElrath, an infectious disease physician and immunologist at Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle.</p> <p>What’s more, other parts of the immune system can remember and destroy the virus over many months if not years, according to at least four studies published in top-tier journals over the past month.</p> <p>Specialized immune cells called T cells produced after immunization by four brands of Covid vaccine — Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, Johnson &amp; Johnson and Novavax — are about 80 percent as powerful against Omicron as other variants, the research found. Given how different Omicron’s mutations are from previous variants, it’s very likely that T cells would mount a similarly robust attack on any future variant as well, researchers said.</p> <p>This matches what scientists have found for the SARS coronavirus, which killed nearly 800 people in a 2003 epidemic in Asia. In people exposed to that virus, T cells have lasted <a href="#">more than 17 years</a>. Evidence so far indicates that the immune cells for the new coronavirus — sometimes called memory cells — may also decline very slowly, experts said.</p> <p>“Memory responses can last for ages,” said Wendy Burgers, an immunologist at the University of Cape Town who led <a href="#">one of the studies</a>, published in the journal Nature. “Potentially, the T-cell response is extremely long lived.”</p>

Throughout the pandemic, a disproportionate amount of research attention has gone to antibodies, the body's first line of defense against a virus. That's partly because these molecules are relatively easy to study: They can be measured from a drop of blood.

Analyzing immune cells, by contrast, requires milliliters of blood, skill, specialized equipment — and a lot of time. “It's orders of magnitude slower and more laborious,” Dr. Burgers said.

Few labs have the wherewithal to study these cells, and their findings lag weeks behind those on antibodies. Perhaps as a result, scientists have frequently overlooked the importance of other parts of the immune system, experts said.

“Most people don't even know what they are — a lot of doctors and scientists are not completely clear what a T cell is,” said Dr. Dan Barouch, a virologist at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston who led [one of the T-cell studies](#).

“Fundamentally, I would argue that T cells are probably more important than what many people have given them credit for,” Dr. Barouch said.

Antibodies spike after every shot of vaccine — or after each exposure to the virus — and inevitably decline within a few weeks to months.

Waning antibody levels after two vaccine doses prompted federal officials to recommend boosters for everyone older than 12. The extra shots fortified antibody levels and helped to contain Omicron's spread, but they too appear to lose some of their ability to prevent infections within four months, [according to recent data](#) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Antibodies recognize two or three key parts of the spike protein, a protrusion on the outside of the coronavirus that allows it to latch on to human cells. But T cells detect many more parts of the spike, and so are less likely to [fail when the virus gains mutations](#) in some of them.

Vaccines also encode a memory of the virus in B cells, which can churn out fresh batches of antibodies within four or five days after a new exposure to the virus.

This dual punch of T and B cells help explain why many people who received two or even three doses of vaccine could still be infected with the Omicron variant, but only a small percentage became seriously ill.

“You will see a decrease of the antibody levels over time, but if memory B cells are still there, and memory T cells are still there, they can kick back into action relatively quickly,” said Alessandro Sette, an immunologist at the La Jolla Institute for Immunology who [led a new study of T cells](#) published in Cell.

Memory B cells become increasingly sophisticated over time, and they learn to recognize a diverse set of viral genetic sequences. The longer they have to practice, the broader the range of virus variants they can thwart.

Researchers showed last year that the elite school inside of lymph nodes where the B cells train, called the germinal center, remains [active for at least 15 weeks](#) after the second dose of a Covid vaccine. In an updated study [published in the journal Nature](#), the same team showed that six months after vaccination, memory B cells continue to mature, and the antibodies they produce keep gaining the ability to recognize new variants.

“Those antibodies at six months are better binders and more potent neutralizers than the ones that are produced one month after immunization,” said Ali Ellebedy, an immunologist at Washington University in St. Louis who led the study.

In the newest study, another team showed that a third shot creates an even richer pool of B cells than the second shot did, and the antibodies they produce recognize a broader range of variants. In laboratory

experiments, these antibodies were able to fend off the Beta, Delta and Omicron variants. In fact, more than half of the antibodies seen one month after a third dose were able to neutralize Omicron, even though the vaccine was not designed for that variant, the study found.

"If you've had a third dose, you're going to have a rapid response that's going to have quite a bit of specificity for Omicron, which explains why people that have had a third dose do so much better," said Michel Nussenzweig, an immunologist at Rockefeller University who led the study.

Memory cells produced after infection with the coronavirus, rather than by the vaccines, seem less potent against the Omicron variant, [according to a study](#) published last month in Nature Medicine. Immunity generated by infection "varies quite a lot, while the vaccine response is much more consistently good," said Marcus Buggert, an immunologist at the Karolinska Institute in Sweden who led the study.

Although most people, vaccinated or not, show only a small drop in their T cell response against Omicron, about one in five had "significant reductions of their responses" of about 60 percent, Dr. Buggert said. The differences are most likely because of their underlying genetic makeup, he said.

Still, the recent studies suggest that in most people, the immunity gained from infection or vaccination will hold up for a long while. Even if mutations in new variants change some of the viral regions that T cells recognize, there would still be enough others to maintain a reasonably strong immune response, experts said.

One big unknown is how slowly the T cells may decline, and whether two doses of vaccine can create a long-lasting response, or if instead people would need three — as some experts have suggested — to cement immune memory.

"That's a question that we don't know the answer to yet," Dr. Burgers said. "Those are the kind of studies that we're going to need to do."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	02/21 Seattle PD struggles to hire new officers
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.q13fox.com/news/seattle-police-department-struggling-to-hire-new-officers-amid-surging-crime">https://www.q13fox.com/news/seattle-police-department-struggling-to-hire-new-officers-amid-surging-crime</a>
GIST	<p><b>SEATTLE</b> - Violent <a href="#">crime</a> reached a 14-year high in <a href="#">Seattle</a> last year as the city's <a href="#">police department</a> deals with a staffing shortage that is straining its ability to protect the community.</p> <p>Seattle Mayor Bruce Harrell said during his state of the city address this week that there is funding to hire 125 new officers this year and put more resources on the street.</p> <p>"The depleted staffing we see today does not allow us to react to emergencies and crime with the response times our residents deserve," <a href="#">Harrell said</a> Tuesday.</p> <p>"It does not allow us to staff the specialty teams we need for issues like domestic violence or DUI or financial crimes targeting the elderly," he said. "It does not allow us to conduct the thorough investigations we expect to make sustainable change."</p> <p>Twenty officers left the force in January, 171 officers exited last year, and 186 officers separated from the force in 2020 amid the push to defund the police. Only 137 officers have been hired in that time span.</p> <p>Violent crime <a href="#">rose 20%</a> last year, mainly driven by a 24% surge in aggravated assaults and 18% surge in robberies, according to the Seattle Police Department. Homicides fell by 25% and rapes decreased 6%.</p> <p>There were 612 criminal shootings last year, a 40% increase over 2020 and 86% increase over 2019.</p>

	<p>Property crimes also increased by 9%.</p> <p>Former Seattle Mayor Jenny Durkan issued an executive order last year authorizing \$10,000-\$25,000 hiring bonuses for officers, but those funds are <a href="#">no longer available in 2022</a>.</p> <p>Last November, the Seattle City Council voted against a budget amendment that would have eliminated another 101 officers from the force.</p> <p>Interim Police Chief Adrian Diaz said at the time that the department needs more officers, not fewer.</p> <p>"I know we can retain and hire amazing officers – I see it every day – but the continuing message from some that less officers is the right path to public safety makes that nearly impossible," Diaz said.</p> <p>As the police department tries to hire new officers, newly elected City Attorney Ann Davison announced this month that her office will make a charging decision on all incoming cases within five days.</p> <p>"The best way to interrupt crime happening on the streets today is by quickly and efficiently moving on the cases referred to us by the Seattle Police Department," <a href="#">Davison said</a>.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>02/22 US offers limited initial response to Russia</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/21/us/politics/russia-ukraine-biden-response.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/21/us/politics/russia-ukraine-biden-response.html</a>
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — Russia’s decision to <a href="#">order troops into Ukraine</a> on Monday presented the United States and Europe with the challenge of deciding how quickly to move in imposing stiff sanctions on Moscow, seeking to balance punishment, deterrence and maintaining unity among the allies.</p> <p>President Biden’s initial reaction was cautious, limited to issuing a narrow set of sanctions aimed at two regions in eastern Ukraine that are partly controlled by Russian-backed separatists and that President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia recognized as independent on Monday.</p> <p>The targeted nature of the penalties appeared intended to allow the United States and its European allies to hold in reserve the most aggressive sanctions they have threatened to impose on Moscow if Mr. Putin carries out a full-scale assault to bring down Ukraine’s democratically elected government.</p> <p>In private, administration officials have conceded that Mr. Putin did not seem interested in further negotiations that did not address his core demands that NATO stop expanding to the east, and speculated that he had tolerated diplomatic overtures mostly to gain time to mass his forces.</p> <p>White House officials said a further Western response would be announced on Tuesday, by which time several of Mr. Biden’s aides said they expected to see Russian forces rolling over the border into Ukraine, crossing the line that Mr. Biden had set for imposing “swift and severe” sanctions on Moscow.</p> <p>That response will include at least some sanctions, a White House official said late Monday, in response to “Moscow’s decisions and actions.” But officials declined to provide details about how far Mr. Biden and his allies planned to go in punishing Mr. Putin.</p> <p>The harshest of the <a href="#">sanctions that administration officials have previewed</a> in recent weeks include cutting Russia’s largest banks off from the global economic system, starving Russian heavy industry of semiconductors and other advanced technology, and — if it comes to it — <a href="#">arming an insurgency</a> as Ukrainians fight for their freedom.</p> <p>But it was not clear that Mr. Biden or his more reluctant allies — especially Germany and Italy, which are dependent on Russian gas imports — were ready to unleash the full sanctions package.</p>

Mr. Putin's [incremental approach](#) to ratcheting up the pressure on Ukraine appears intended to exploit any fissures in what has been a quite [unified NATO and European posture](#). Some nations may be reluctant to reach for the most punishing sanctions if Mr. Putin's forces remain in Russian-speaking eastern Ukraine, where Russia has exercised great influence during an eight-year conflict.

Yet the limited geographic reach of Mr. Putin's initial claim on Ukrainian territory stood in sharp contrast to the implication in his winding, hourlong speech on Monday that the entire country was a part of Russia.

He made clear his wider ambition was to reclaim Ukraine and continue rebuilding the empire that collapsed with the end of the Soviet Union three decades ago. At one point he said it outright: "Modern-day Ukraine was in full and in whole created by Russia — Bolshevik, Communist Russia, to be precise."

Briefing reporters on the condition of anonymity on Monday evening, a senior administration official called Mr. Putin's speech an address to the Russian people to justify war, and said the administration was under no illusions about what was likely to happen next.

But it is unclear that Mr. Putin cares about the next round of sanctions, believing that his economy can withstand anything Mr. Biden and other Western leaders throw at him. In his speech, he referred to Mr. Biden's sanctions threats as "blackmail," saying they would have been "put in place on Russia regardless of what happens in Ukraine."

"The purpose," he argued, is "to keep Russia behind, to prevent it from developing. And they will do it even without any formal pretext. Just because we exist."

Mr. Putin's winding, grievance-filled speech was filled with accusations that Ukraine was seeking its own nuclear arsenal — there is no evidence that is true — and that NATO was plotting to place Tomahawk missiles on Ukrainian territory, where they could strike Russia in minutes.

"I don't doubt they are already calculating how to realize these plans," Mr. Putin said.

American officials have said for months that there are no such plans, and Mr. Biden said at a January news conference that Ukraine was still years away from qualifying for NATO membership. But he has been unwilling to bend to Mr. Putin's demand that NATO cease accepting new members, and that he provide a written, binding guarantee that Ukraine would never be part of the Western alliance.

Mr. Biden's options for countering any military moves into Ukraine in coming days are limited. He has said repeatedly that he would not allow American forces to fight in Ukraine. But there is no guarantee that the conflict will not spill over Ukraine's borders.

Europe was [girding for refugees](#) fleeing a modern, if corruption-ridden, democracy whose president, Volodymyr Zelensky, was in Munich on Saturday pleading his case that NATO must open its doors to his country — and thus defend it. Mr. Biden's own national security officials have been warning American utilities, banks and other businesses to harden their networks against what they fear will be a wave of Russian-origin cyberattacks and ransomware, which they have publicly warned could be unleashed in reaction to the sanctions.

While Mr. Biden's actions on Monday night were restrained, his administration denounced the Russian decision as a breach of the rules governing the global order.

In a statement, Jen Psaki, the White House press secretary, called Mr. Putin's move a "blatant violation of Russia's international commitments."

The secretary general of the United Nations, António Guterres, called the action a violation of his organization's charter. The United Nations Security Council [held an emergency meeting](#) late Monday night in which the United States and its allies denounced Moscow's actions — but Russia holds a veto in that body, assuring that it could block any action.

In a joint statement, the European Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, and the European Council president, Charles Michel, wrote that the European Union would “react with sanctions against those involved in this illegal act,” and that it “reiterates its unwavering support to Ukraine’s independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders.”

White House officials said Mr. Biden spoke with Mr. Zelensky for about 35 minutes after Mr. Putin’s speech. Ms. Psaki did not provide any details about the call, but said the United States was “continuing to closely consult with allies and partners, including Ukraine.”

Mr. Biden’s decision to hold back the full sanctions — for now — came as voices across the political spectrum called on Monday for the United States and its European allies to unleash the threatened economic measures on Moscow now, before Mr. Putin extends his control beyond the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine.

Mr. Putin’s “decision should immediately be met with forceful sanctions to destroy the ruble and crush the Russian oil and gas sector,” Senator Lindsey Graham, Republican of South Carolina and a longtime hawk on Russia, [wrote on Twitter](#) shortly after the Russian president concluded his remarks.

Even close allies of Mr. Biden like Senator Chris Coons, the Delaware Democrat who frequently consults with the president on foreign policy issues, said on Monday night that the time to hit Russia with economic penalties had begun.

“The time for taking action to impose significant costs on President Putin and the Kremlin starts now,” he said in a statement issued as he toured Eastern European NATO nations. He said Mr. Putin “has made clear he intends to further invade Ukraine in a blatant effort to redraw the borders of Eastern Europe according to the whims of Moscow.”

Michael A. McFaul, who served as President Barack Obama’s ambassador to Russia, also urged Mr. Biden and the United States allies not to wait.

“Let’s be clear, this act is an invasion of the sovereign country of Ukraine,” he [wrote on Twitter](#). “The West has to react forcefully, not ‘proportionally,’ and implement the full range of sanctions they have been promising.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	<b>02/21 Snow knocks power parts of western Wash.</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/weather/snow-leaves-thousands-without-power-in-parts-of-western-washington/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/weather/snow-leaves-thousands-without-power-in-parts-of-western-washington/</a>
GIST	<p>Overnight snow left thousands in Western Washington without power Monday morning, as “false spring” gave way to winter weather, expected to last until midweek.</p> <p>According to the National Weather Service, areas of Snohomish County saw anywhere from a “light dusting” to half an inch of snow overnight, with more in Marysville and the area north of Everett.</p> <p>Areas of Skagit County received between 1 and 3 inches of snow, but Camano Island experienced significantly more, according to NWS, with unofficial reports of as much as 6 inches.</p> <p>“It really just sat right over the island and kept snowing for several hours,” NWS meteorologist Dustin Guy said Monday morning, noting that nearby Arlington got only about a half-inch of snow. “If you go just a few miles east or west of the island, it’s completely different.”</p> <p>Snohomish County Public Utility District reported more than 6,100 outages as of about 11:30 a.m., though the numbers had topped 8,000 earlier in the morning. Outages were concentrated around Camano Island and just west of Arlington.</p>



	<p>The snow band was still moving through Port Angeles and the northern part of the state late morning Monday, but was expected to clear with “cold and dry” weather expected in the area through Thursday, according to Guy.</p> <p>According to the weather service, cold rain is still possible throughout Monday in the Seattle area and across Western Washington. Overnight lows will return to the 20s this week after two weeks of “false spring” with higher temperatures.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>02/21 Concern: kids abandoned in hospitals ERs</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/mental-health/abandoned-in-the-er-when-kids-are-left-at-hospitals-the-state-is-no-longer-taking-charge-of-their-care/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/mental-health/abandoned-in-the-er-when-kids-are-left-at-hospitals-the-state-is-no-longer-taking-charge-of-their-care/</a>
GIST	<p>In 2021, emergency room social workers at Mary Bridge Children’s Hospital in Tacoma called Child Protective Services 11 times asking for assistance.</p> <p>Each time, a child had been left in the ER — abandoned, as far as the hospital was concerned — by their parent or guardian.</p> <p>And each time, when asked to help find the child someone to care for them, the agency said no.</p> <p>The experience at Mary Bridge is an example of what hospital staff describe as a new and concerning trend across the state’s pediatric emergency rooms. Medical staff at all three of Washington’s children’s hospitals say they’re increasingly keeping children who are not in need of long-term medical or psychiatric care in the ER for days or weeks because there’s nowhere else for them to go.</p> <p>The phenomena represents an atypical form of “boarding,” a term that refers to a person living in limbo inside a hospital unit that’s ill-suited to their needs. A more common type of boarding involves patients in psychiatric crisis, like 16-year-old Dylan Tonseth, who has several mental health conditions and lived in the Sacred Heart Children’s ER in Spokane for 33 days. Children in need of intense therapy or long-term residential stays are increasingly finding themselves stuck in ERs without access to an inpatient bed — a problem that existed pre-pandemic but <a href="#">is only getting worse</a>.</p> <p>The 11 cases at Mary Bridge, though, represent a different problem from what Dylan experienced, hospital workers say. Most of the children came in with behavioral or psychological concerns, but were stabilized by hospital staff and ready to be discharged. But they couldn’t leave. Their parents or guardians refused to pick them up. In prior years, the hospital could rely on Child Protective Services, or CPS, to take an abandoned child into custody, but the agency no longer does this, state officials and hospital staff say. The state’s explanation: In the ER, children are technically safe.</p> <p>The state doesn’t track the number of times hospitals call CPS about children stranded in ERs, officials at the Department of Children, Youth, and Families say.</p> <p>At Mary Bridge, the 11 children abandoned in 2021 represent a sliver of the 1,300-1,500 kids who come to its ER each year. These children are among the most vulnerable to show up inside the emergency department, said Jamie Kautz, assistant vice president of the pediatric care continuum at Mary Bridge.</p> <p>Seven of the 11, she said, were previously dependents of the state — meaning they were in foster care or group homes. They range in age from 7-17. And they lived in the ER an average of three weeks. One of the abandoned children stayed in the ER for 67 days. One stayed for 40 days. A third was there for nearly a month.</p> <p><b>Holding pattern</b></p> <p>Many of these children are brought to the ER by adults who assume they have symptoms or behaviors that will qualify them for an inpatient psychiatric bed. But they often don’t. Kautz said abandoned children often have a history of trauma and depression but aren’t in need of inpatient psychiatric hospitalization.</p>

Families refuse to take back their children for often complex and emotionally fraught reasons; many have struggled to get their kids psychiatric help early because of a lack of availability of outpatient care. The child might have difficult or dangerous behaviors that could put their siblings at risk. Some have intellectual or developmental disabilities and their families are unsure how to care for them. They might be in foster care and prone to meltdowns because their home life is unstable. Or the child's guardians might be so financially or emotionally strained that they feel they have to give up their parental responsibility.

Parents of children with developmental disabilities or aggressive behavior face particular challenges, Kautz said. "We are seeing parents with injuries. They want to be safe, they want their children to be safe," she said. "They know it's emotionally taxing on their children to be so distressed and physically aggressive in the home. ... [They] are invested caregivers, but really they just can't do it anymore. It requires superhuman ability."

The decision to leave a child in the ER means they're occupying a bed that would otherwise be used to serve several patients each day, said officials from the Washington State Hospital Association. When children are ready to be discharged but aren't, "you are putting intense pressure on the existing resource[s] of the hospitals," said Chelene Whiteaker, senior vice president of government affairs at the association.

Hospital staff say they work closely with families and state agencies to find a solution. But many social services families used to rely on — state-paid respite care, special education services — were reduced or disappeared during the pandemic [when schools closed](#) and in-person services weren't as easy to receive. Families want their children to be safe but some say they just can't ensure their safety at home, said Chris Ladish, chief clinical officer of pediatric behavioral health at Mary Bridge.

"You wind up with generally three opposing forces," she said. "One is a parent saying, 'You're not hearing me, I can't [bring my child home]. You've got an ER saying the child is being completely compliant and delightful and we feel they're ready to come home ... so then what happens is you might try to get the state involved."

### **Child in the woods**

In the past, case workers from Washington's Department of Children, Youth, and Families, or DCYF, would take custody of a child abandoned in the ER and work with the family and hospital to find a suitable place for the child to live, hospital workers say. This wasn't always easy: [DCYF's resources are strained, and the agency has for years sent hundreds of children](#) to sleep in hotels or offices as they wait for more permanent placements. A 2021 court ruling requires the agency to wind down such placements.

But around April 2021, Kautz said, DCYF seemed to change its interpretation of the state's abandonment law altogether.

At least two separate areas of Washington law define child abandonment.

There's [the section of state code](#) that Kautz has always looked to. "Abandoned means when the child's parent, guardian, or other custodian has expressed, either by statement or conduct, an intent to forgo, for an extended period, parental rights or responsibilities despite an ability to exercise such rights and responsibilities," the law reads.

Then, there's [the section of code](#) DCYF says it uses. A person is guilty of abandonment, the law says, if the person "recklessly abandons the child" and as a result, the child suffers bodily harm. According to DCYF, the section of code Kautz referenced isn't applicable in cases where parents feel they can't take their children home from a hospital.

"Kids who are in a hospital, they're not recklessly abandoned," said Erik Applebee, a DCYF regional administrator for King County. There's food, as well as medical providers and security guards. "Reckless abandonment is more like taking a vulnerable child out into the woods and leaving them there where there is an imminent and substantial risk they will suffer bodily harm," he said.

DCYF recently consulted with the state Attorney General’s Office on this question, Applebee said. The office declined to answer questions for this article, noting that it doesn’t comment on whether state agencies have asked its legal opinion since part of the attorney general’s role is to provide legal representation for such agencies.

The clashing interpretations of the law have created a fundamental disagreement between hospitals and child welfare officials — one that’s keeping children in a holding pattern without access to regular schooling, exercise, social time or supportive adults.

Inside the Mary Bridge ER, the 11 children were secluded in 10-foot by 10-foot private rooms without windows or the ability to go outdoors.

The story is similar at Sacred Heart Children’s Hospital in Spokane, where one child recently abandoned by their family boarded in the ER for three weeks, said Dr. Breanna Barger-Kamate, an emergency room doctor there. “At some point, people actually really start to deteriorate, like a prisoner of war would,” she said. “You can’t put people in isolation like that.”

When asked about its interpretation of the law, DCYF said the agency is attempting to make its approach to child abandonment cases more consistent, and is now declining to get involved when there’s no allegation of child abuse or neglect.

Bringing a child into foster care, or temporarily housing them at a hotel, “We think is [usually worse for the child](#),” said Jenny Heddin, director of strategic initiatives and collaboration at DCYF.

“It’s not great for a young person to be boarded in an emergency department or in an institutional setting longer than they need to be there,” she said. “But when they come over to child welfare, typically we don’t have good placement options for those young people either.”

Kautz said she understands DCYF’s position, but “If DCYF is going to back out on these kids, what takes its place?”

“These long stays are reflective of not just the complexity of the child’s presentation and family needs,” she said. “But it’s also reflective of the complexity of the shredded social safety net.”

The kids at Mary Bridge eventually were discharged from the hospital. Some returned to their adoptive parents, Kautz said. Others went to live with other family members.

At least one, she said, was sent to juvenile detention.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	02/22 Putin orders troops to eastern Ukraine
SOURCE	<a href="https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-joe-biden-boris-johnson-europe-emmanuel-macron-2b7c2949ae3168effce9d0cb2584bb32">https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-joe-biden-boris-johnson-europe-emmanuel-macron-2b7c2949ae3168effce9d0cb2584bb32</a>
GIST	<p>MOSCOW (AP) — A long-feared Russian invasion of Ukraine appeared to be imminent Monday, if not already underway, with Russian President Vladimir Putin ordering forces into separatist regions of eastern Ukraine.</p> <p>A vaguely worded decree signed by Putin did not say if troops were on the move, and it cast the order as an effort to “maintain peace.” But it appeared to dash the slim remaining hopes of averting a major conflict in Europe that could cause massive casualties, energy shortages on the continent and economic chaos around the globe.</p> <p>Putin’s directive came hours after he recognized the separatist regions in a rambling, fact-bending discourse on European history. The move paved the way to provide them military support, antagonizing</p>

Western leaders who regard it as a breach of world order, and set off a frenzied scramble by the U.S. and others to respond.

Underscoring the urgency, the U.N. Security Council held a rare nighttime emergency meeting on Monday at the request of Ukraine, the U.S. and other countries. Undersecretary-General Rosemary DiCarlo opened the session with a warning that “the risk of major conflict is real and needs to be prevented at all costs.”

Ukraine’s president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, sought to project calm, telling the country: “We are not afraid of anyone or anything. We don’t owe anyone anything. And we won’t give anything to anyone.” His foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, would be in Washington on Tuesday to meet with Secretary of State Antony Blinken, the State Department said.

The White House issued an executive order to prohibit U.S. investment and trade in the separatist regions, and additional measures — likely sanctions — were to be announced Tuesday. Those sanctions are independent of what Washington has prepared in the event of a Russian invasion, according to a senior administration official who briefed reporters on the condition of anonymity.

The State Department, meanwhile, said U.S. personnel in Lviv — in Ukraine’s far west — would spend the night in Poland but return to Ukraine to continue their diplomatic work and emergency consular services. It again urged any American citizens in Ukraine to leave immediately.

The developments came during a spike in skirmishes in the eastern regions that Western powers believe Russia could use as a pretext for an attack on the Western-looking democracy that has defied Moscow’s attempts to pull it back into its orbit.

Putin justified his decision in a far-reaching, pre-recorded speech blaming NATO for the current crisis and calling the U.S.-led alliance an existential threat to Russia. Sweeping through more than a century of history, he painted today’s Ukraine as a modern construct that is inextricably linked to Russia. He charged that Ukraine had inherited Russia’s historic lands and after the Soviet collapse was used by the West to contain Russia.

“I consider it necessary to take a long-overdue decision: To immediately recognize the independence and sovereignty of Donetsk People’s Republic and Luhansk People’s Republic,” Putin said.

Afterward he signed matching decrees recognizing the two regions’ independence, eight years after fighting erupted between Russia-backed separatists and Ukrainian forces, and called on lawmakers to approve measures paving the way for military support.

Until now, Ukraine and the West have accused Russia of supporting the separatists with arms and troops, but Moscow has denied that, saying that Russians who fought there were volunteers.

At an earlier meeting of Putin’s Security Council, a stream of top officials argued for recognizing the regions’ independence. One slipped up and said he favored including them as part of Russia — but Putin quickly corrected him.

Recognizing the separatist regions’ independence is likely to be popular in Russia, where many share Putin’s worldview. Russian state media released images of people in Donetsk setting off fireworks, waving large Russian flags and playing Russia’s national anthem.

Ukrainians in Kyiv, meanwhile, bristled at the move.

“Why should Russia recognize (the rebel-held regions)? If neighbors come to you and say, ‘This room will be ours,’ would you care about their opinion or not? It’s your flat, and it will be always your flat,” said Maria Levchyshchyna, a 48-year-old painter in the Ukrainian capital. “Let them recognize whatever they want. But in my view, it can also provoke a war, because normal people will fight for their country.”

With an estimated 150,000 Russian troops massed on three sides of Ukraine, the U.S. [has warned that Moscow has already decided to invade](#). Still, President Joe [Biden and Putin tentatively agreed to a meeting brokered by French President Emmanuel Macron](#) in a last-ditch effort to avoid war.

If Russia moves in, the meeting will be off, but the prospect of a face-to-face summit resuscitated hopes in diplomacy to prevent a conflict that could devastate Ukraine and cause [huge economic damage across Europe](#), which is heavily dependent on Russian energy.

Russia says it wants Western guarantees that NATO won't allow Ukraine and other former Soviet countries to join as members — and Putin said Monday that a simple moratorium on Ukraine's accession wouldn't be enough. Moscow has also demanded the alliance halt weapons deployments to Ukraine and roll back its forces from Eastern Europe — demands flatly rejected by the West.

Macron's office said Biden and Putin had “accepted the principle of such a summit,” to be followed by a broader meeting that would include other “relevant stakeholders to discuss security and strategic stability in Europe.”

U.S. national security adviser Jake Sullivan, meanwhile, said the administration has always been ready to talk to avert a war — but was also prepared to respond to any attack.

During Monday night's emergency meeting, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, said Putin “has put before the world a choice” and it “must not look away” because “history tells us that looking the other way in the face of such hostility will be a far more costly path.”

China's U.N. Ambassador Zhang Jun called for restraint and a diplomatic solution to the crisis.

Putin's announcement shattered a 2015 peace deal signed in Minsk requiring Ukraine to offer broad self-rule to the rebel regions, a major diplomatic coup for Moscow.

That deal was resented by many in Ukraine who saw it as a capitulation, a blow to the country's integrity and a betrayal of national interests. Putin and other officials argued Monday that the Ukrainian government has shown no appetite for implementing it.

Over 14,000 people have been killed since conflict erupted in the eastern industrial heartland of Donbas in 2014, shortly after Moscow annexed Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula.

Potential flashpoints multiplied. Sustained shelling continued Monday along the tense line of contact separating the opposing forces. Unusually, Russia said it had fended off an “incursion” from Ukraine — which Ukrainian officials denied. And Russia decided to prolong military drills in Belarus, which could offer a staging ground for an attack on the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv.

Ukraine and the separatist rebels have traded blame for cease-fire violations with hundreds of explosions recorded daily.

While separatists have charged that Ukrainian forces were firing on residential areas, Associated Press journalists reporting from several towns and villages in Ukrainian-held territory along the line of contact have not witnessed any notable escalation from the Ukrainian side and have documented signs of intensified shelling by the separatists that destroyed homes and ripped up roads.

Some residents of the main rebel-held city of Donetsk described sporadic shelling by Ukrainian forces, but they added that it wasn't on the same scale as earlier in the conflict.

The separatist authorities said Monday that at least four civilians were killed by Ukrainian shelling over the past 24 hours, and several others were wounded. Ukraine's military said two Ukrainian soldiers were killed over the weekend, and another serviceman was wounded Monday.

	<p>Ukrainian military spokesman Pavlo Kovalchyuk insisted that Ukrainian forces weren't returning fire. In the village of Novognativka on the Ukraine government-controlled side, 60-year-old Ekaterina Evseeva said the shelling was worse than at the height of fighting early in the conflict.</p> <p>"We are on the edge of nervous breakdowns," she said, her voice trembling. "And there is nowhere to run."</p> <p>In another worrying sign, the Russian military said it killed five suspected "saboteurs" who crossed from Ukraine into Russia's Rostov region and also destroyed two armored vehicles and took a Ukrainian serviceman prisoner. Ukrainian Border Guard spokesman Andriy Demchenko dismissed the claim as "disinformation."</p> <p>With fears of invasion high, the U.S. administration sent a letter to the United Nations human rights chief claiming that Moscow has compiled a list of Ukrainians to be killed or sent to detention camps after the invasion. The letter, first reported by The New York Times, was obtained by the AP.</p> <p>Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the claim was a lie and no such list exists.</p>
	<a href="#">Return to Top</a>

HEADLINE	<b>02/22 Ukraine: borders 'will remain unchangeable'</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-europe-russia-australia-vladimir-putin-ca1690eeb924ba8fcb341cfc73900860">https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-europe-russia-australia-vladimir-putin-ca1690eeb924ba8fcb341cfc73900860</a>
GIST	<p>UNITED NATIONS — Ukraine's U.N. ambassador is demanding that Russia cancel its recognition of the independence of separatist regions in the east, immediately withdraw its "occupation troops" sent there by President Vladimir Putin, and return to negotiations.</p> <p>Sergiy Kyslytsya told an emergency meeting of the U.N. Security Council on Monday that Ukraine called the rare evening session to protest and condemn Putin's "illegal and illegitimate" decision to recognize the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in violations of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity and the U.N. Charter.</p> <p>Despite Putin's actions, he said, "the internationally recognized borders of Ukraine have been and will remain unchangeable regardless of any statements and actions by the Russian Federation."</p> <p>He said Russia's occupation of Donetsk and Luhansk ruin negotiating frameworks and "may be considered" as Russia's unilateral withdrawal from the Minsk Agreements aimed at restoring peace to eastern Ukraine, and its disregard of the Normandy format comprising Russia, Ukraine, France and Germany which has tried to resolve the eight-year war in the east.</p> <p>"We are committed to a political diplomatic settlement and do not succumb to provocations," Kyslytsya said.</p> <p>While Ukraine has the right to self-defense, he said, "We are committed to a peaceful and diplomatic path and we will stay firmly on it. We are on our land. We are not afraid of anything or anyone. We owe nothing to anyone, and we will not give away anything to anyone."</p> <p>Kyslytsya urged the Security Council to support Ukraine and take action to restore international peace and security, but that will be virtually impossible because of Russia's veto power in the council.</p> <p>—</p> <p>ANKARA, Turkey — Turkey criticized Russia's decision to recognize the independence of two separatist regions in eastern Ukraine, describing the move as a "clear violation of Ukraine's political unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity."</p>



A Turkish Foreign Ministry statement early Tuesday said: “we find this decision by Russia unacceptable and reject it.”

“We emphasize our commitment to the preservation of Ukraine’s political unity and territorial integrity, and call on all parties to use common sense and comply with international law,” the ministry statement read.

NATO-member Turkey has close relations to both Ukraine and Russia and had repeatedly offered to mediate to end the tensions.

Separately, the Turkish Foreign Ministry issued a statement to “strongly recommend” that Turkish citizens leave Ukraine’s eastern regions.

—

SEOUL, South Korea – South Korea’s Foreign Ministry has issued “grave concern” over the Ukraine crisis and called for related nations to respect the Minsk agreement while finding a diplomatic solution.

Ministry spokesperson Choi Young-sam also said Tuesday that diplomats were still trying to persuade 63 South Korean nationals who currently remain in Ukraine to leave the country. There were around 600 South Koreans in Ukraine at the end of January.

“Our government has consistently supported Ukraine’s sovereignty and the preservation of its territory,” Choi said during a briefing, reiterating President Moon Jae-in’s comments during an earlier national security meeting.

“Our government strongly calls for related nations to pursue peaceful resolutions based on respect for international law and the Minsk agreement,” Choi said. He was referring to a 2015 ceasefire arrangement signed between Russia and Ukraine at the Belarusian capital following months of bloody conflict in eastern Ukraine.

Moon during the earlier meeting called for officials to prepare for an economic fallout in South Korea if the Ukraine crisis is prolonged and the U.S.-led West imposes stringent economic sanctions on Ukraine.

—

UNITED NATIONS — Russia’s U.N. ambassador has accused the United States and its Western allies of egging Ukraine toward “an armed provocation.”

Speaking at an emergency meeting of the U.N. Security Council on Monday night, Vassily Nebenzia accused Ukraine of sharply increasing shelling in residential areas of the separatist Luhansk and Donetsk regions and in Russian towns and villages near the border.

He said Ukraine has concentrated a 120,000-strong military contingent along the contact line with pro-Russian separatists in the east and “subversive groups” have penetrated or tried to penetrate the territory known as the Donbas to sabotage critical infrastructure.

“So it has become clear that Donbas is on the brink of a new Ukrainian military adventure as was already the case in 2014 and 2015,” he said.

Nebenzia said that’s why President Vladimir Putin announced earlier Monday that Russia will recognize Luhansk and Donetsk as independent states and is putting Russian troops into the two states as peacekeepers.

The separatist authorities said Monday that at least four civilians were killed by Ukrainian shelling over the past 24 hours, and several others were wounded. Ukraine’s military said two Ukrainian soldiers were

killed over the weekend, and another serviceman was wounded Monday. Ukrainian military spokesman Pavlo Kovalchuk insisted that Ukrainian forces weren't returning fire.

Nebenzia said Russia was open to diplomacy but wouldn't allow "a new bloodbath in the Donbas," urging the United States and other Western nations to not worsen the situation.

---

SEOUL, South Korea – South Korean President Moon Jae-in on Tuesday issued support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territory amid fears of an imminent invasion by Russia and called for related nations to resolve the situation through dialogue.

In an emergency meeting with national security and economic officials, Moon instructed them to prepare for the economic fallout in South Korea if the Ukraine crisis is prolonged and the U.S.-led West imposes stringent economic sanctions on Russia.

Moon during the part of his comments released to the media didn't directly criticize Russia. But he noted that the United States and other Western nations have condemned Russian plans to deploy troops in separatist areas of eastern Ukraine as a violation of international law and an infringement of Ukraine's sovereignty and territory.

"Ukraine's sovereignty and territory must be respected," Moon added. "It would not be ideal if the situation in Ukraine worsens into a military clash against the wishes of the international community. That would bring huge ramifications in the politics and economy of not only Europe, but to the whole world."

---

UNITED NATIONS — China has called for restraint and is encouraging every effort to find a diplomatic solution to the Ukraine crisis, saying Beijing believes all countries should solve disputes by peaceful means in line with the U.N. Charter.

China's U.N. Ambassador Zhang Jun called on the key parties in the Ukraine dispute "to continue dialogue and consultation and seek reasonable solutions."

Zhang gave very brief remarks at an emergency meeting of the U.N. Security Council on Monday night called by Ukraine, the U.S. and six other countries following Russian President Vladimir Putin's announcement that Russia will recognize the separatist areas in eastern Ukraine as independent states and is putting Russian troops into Luhansk and Donetsk as peacekeepers.

The Chinese ambassador made no mention of actions on Monday by its usual ally, Russia, saying only that "all parties concerned must exercise restraint, and avoid any action that may fuel tensions," and to "welcome and encourage every effort for a diplomatic solution."

Chinese state media is reporting that China's Embassy in Kyiv notified its citizens in Ukraine to heighten their safety awareness and avoid conflict areas. On Monday, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said China hoped all parties would pursue a solution that is "truly conducive to safeguarding the security of Europe."

---

TOKYO — Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida criticized Russia for violating Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity and said his country will discuss possible "severe actions" including sanctions with the international community.

Kishida was responding to Russian President Vladimir Putin's signing Monday of decree recognizing the independence of two separatist regions in eastern Ukraine, ordering his troops to "maintain peace" in those areas. Putin's announcement raised fears of an imminent invasion.

"Those actions are unacceptable, and we express our strong condemnation," Kishida told reporters Tuesday. "Japan is watching the development with grave concern."

Separately, Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi said Tuesday it was important that Group of Seven nations that share values such as democracy and rule of law stick together and lead the international community. He declined to say if Japan is planning its own sanctions against Russia.

—

UNITED NATIONS — The U.S. ambassador to the United Nations has dismissed "as nonsense" Russian President Vladimir Putin's announcement that he is putting Russian troops in separatist areas of eastern Ukraine as peacekeepers, saying their presence is "clearly the basis for Russia's attempt to create a pretext for a further invasion of Ukraine."

Linda Thomas-Greenfield told an emergency meeting of the U.N. Security Council on Monday night that this move and Putin's earlier announcement that Russia will recognize the separatist areas as "independent states" are also an "unprovoked" attack on Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. By his actions, she said, Putin "has torn the Minsk Agreement to shreds."

Thomas-Greenfield said Putin "has put before the world a choice" and it "must not look away" because "history tells us that looking the other way in the face of such hostility will be a far more costly path."

She said Putin is testing to see "how far he can push us all," and all countries must stand up for the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of all countries.

Thomas-Greenfield warned that "the consequences of Russia's actions will be dire — across Ukraine, across Europe, and across the globe."

—

WELLINGTON, New Zealand — New Zealand Foreign Minister Nanaia Mahuta said there was no basis under international law for recognizing the separatist regions, and that by doing so Russia was further undermining Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

"We are concerned that this is a calculated act by President Putin to create a pretext for invasion, which would be a clear act of aggression. We again call for urgent diplomatic efforts to find a peaceful resolution," Mahuta said in a statement.

—

UNITED NATIONS — The U.N. political chief has opened an emergency meeting of the Security Council, calling Russia's recognition of separatist areas in Ukraine's east a violation of the country's territorial integrity and sovereignty.

Undersecretary-General Rosemary DiCarlo said that "the risk of major conflict is real and needs to be prevented at all costs."

DiCarlo told Monday's rare nighttime meeting of the U.N.'s most powerful body — a reflection of the seriousness of Moscow's action — that everyone involved should focus on ending hostilities immediately.

She said the United Nations regretted Russia's order to deploy Russian troops into eastern Ukraine and expressed deep concern at reports of civilian casualties, the targeting of civilian infrastructure, and escalating shelling between government-controlled areas and the Russian-backed separatists.

Monitors from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe recorded 3,231 cease-fire violations in the Donbas area of eastern Ukraine from Friday to Sunday, she said.

—

TRIABUNNA, Australia — Australia's Prime Minister Scott Morrison said Russia should "unconditionally withdraw" from Ukrainian territory and cease to threaten its neighbors.

Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered forces Monday to "maintain peace" in separatist regions of eastern Ukraine, hours after the Kremlin recognized the area's independence. The announcement raised fears that an invasion was imminent, if not already underway.

Morrison at a news conference Tuesday in Australia's Tasmania state said Russia's actions were "unacceptable, it's unprovoked, it's unwarranted."

"It is important that like-minded countries who denounce this sort of behavior do stick together and I can assure you that the moment that other countries put in place strong and severe sanctions on Russia, we will be in lockstep with them and we will be moving just as quickly and that is what their discussions that we have been engaged with now for some time with our partners," he said.

The Kremlin decree left unclear when, or whether, troops would enter Ukraine. But it brought swift promises of new sanctions and underscored the steep challenges of staving off a military conflict.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	<b>02/21 Rebel-controlled territories eastern Ukraine</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-europe-russia-vladimir-putin-moscow-bcd0c04a2aa146e76b7e757f482f27bb">https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-europe-russia-vladimir-putin-moscow-bcd0c04a2aa146e76b7e757f482f27bb</a>
GIST	<p>MOSCOW (AP) — Russian President Vladimir Putin on Monday recognized the independence of Moscow-backed rebel regions in eastern Ukraine, a move that will further fuel tensions with the West amid fears of Russian invasion.</p> <p>Putin's move follows days of heightened tensions in Ukraine's eastern industrial heartland, where Ukrainian forces are locked in a nearly eight-year conflict with Russia-backed separatists that has left more than 14,000 people dead.</p> <p>Here is a look at the rebel-controlled territories in eastern Ukraine:</p> <p><b>SEPARATIST REBELLION IN THE EAST</b></p> <p>When Ukraine's Moscow-friendly president was driven from office by mass protests in February 2014, Russia responded by annexing Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula. It then threw its weight behind an insurgency in the mostly Russian-speaking eastern Ukraine region known as Donbas.</p> <p>In April 2014, Russia-backed rebels seized government buildings in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, proclaimed the creation of "people's republics" and battled Ukrainian troops and volunteer battalions.</p> <p>The following month, the separatist regions held a popular vote to declare independence and make a bid to become part of Russia. Moscow hasn't accepted the motion, just used the regions as a tool to keep Ukraine in its orbit and prevent it from joining NATO.</p> <p>Ukraine and the West accused Russia of backing the rebels with troops and weapons. Moscow denied that, saying any Russians who fought there were volunteers.</p>

Amid ferocious battles involving tanks, heavy artillery and warplanes, Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 was shot down over eastern Ukraine on July 17, 2014, killing all 298 people aboard. An international probe concluded that the passenger jet was downed by a Russia-supplied missile from the rebel-controlled territory in Ukraine. Moscow still denied any involvement.

#### PEACE AGREEMENTS FOR EASTERN UKRAINE

After a massive defeat of Ukrainian troops in August 2014, envoys from Kyiv, the rebels and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe signed a truce in the Belarusian capital of Minsk in September 2014.

The document envisaged an OSCE-observed cease-fire, a pullback of all foreign fighters, an exchange of prisoners and hostages, an amnesty for the rebels and a promise that separatist regions could have a degree of self-rule.

The deal quickly collapsed and large-scale fighting resumed, leading to another major defeat for Ukrainian forces at Debaltsevo in January-February of 2015.

France and Germany brokered another peace agreement, which was signed in Minsk in February 2015 by representatives of Ukraine, Russia and the rebels. It envisaged a new cease-fire, a pullback of heavy weapons and a series of moves toward a political settlement. A declaration backing the deal was signed by the leaders of Russia, Ukraine, France and Germany.

#### A FROZEN CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

The 2015 peace deal was a major diplomatic coup for the Kremlin, obliging Ukraine to grant special status to the separatist regions, allowing them to create their own police force and have a say in appointing local prosecutors and judges. It also envisaged that Ukraine could only regain control over the roughly 200-kilometer (125-mile) border with Russia in rebel regions after they get self-rule and hold OSCE-monitored local elections — balloting that would almost certainly keep pro-Moscow rebels in power there.

Many Ukrainians see it as a betrayal of national interests and its implementation has stalled.

The Minsk document helped end full-scale fighting, but the situation has remained tense and regular skirmishes have continued.

With the Minsk deal stalled, Moscow's hope to use rebel regions to directly influence Ukraine's politics has failed but the frozen conflict has drained Kyiv's resources and effectively stymied its goal of joining NATO — which is enshrined in the Ukrainian constitution.

Moscow also has worked to secure its hold on the rebel regions by handing out more than 720,000 Russian passports to roughly one-fifth of their population of about 3.6 million. It has provided economic and financial assistance to the separatist territories, but the aid has been insufficient to alleviate the massive damage from fighting and shore up the economy. The Donbas region accounted for about 16% of Ukraine's GDP before the conflict.

#### EFFORTS TO REVIVE PEACE DEAL

Amid soaring tensions over the Russian troop concentration near Ukraine, France and Germany embarked on renewed efforts to encourage compliance with the 2015 deal, in hopes that it could help defuse the current standoff.

Facing calls from Berlin and Paris for its implementation, Ukrainian officials have strengthened their criticism of the Minsk deal and warned that it could lead to the country's demise. Two rounds of talks in

	<p>Paris and Berlin between presidential envoys from Russia, Ukraine, France and Germany have yielded no progress.</p> <p>The lower house of the Russian parliament, meanwhile, urged Putin last week to recognize the independence of Ukraine's rebel regions.</p> <p><b>PUTIN RECOGNIZES REBEL REGIONS' INDEPENDENCE</b></p> <p>Putin's recognition of the rebel-held territories' independence effectively shatters the Minsk peace agreements and will further fuel tensions with the West. He said that Moscow would sign friendship treaties with the rebel territories, a move that could pave the way for Russia to openly support them with troops and weapons.</p> <p>The move follows several days of shelling that erupted along the line of contact in Donetsk and Luhansk. Ukraine and the West accused Moscow of fomenting the tensions to create a pretext for an invasion. Russia, in turn, accused Ukraine of trying to reclaim the rebel-held territories by force, the claim that Kyiv strongly rejected.</p> <p>On Friday, separatist leaders released video statements announcing the evacuation of civilians in the face of what they described as a Ukrainian "aggression." The data embedded in the video indicated that their statements had been pre-recorded two days earlier when the situation was still relatively calm, suggesting a deliberate plan to try to sever the regions from Ukraine.</p> <p>The rebel chiefs put out new video statements Monday urging Putin to recognize their regions' independence and the Russian leader responded quickly by convening a carefully orchestrated meeting of his Security Council and then signing the recognition decrees in a televised ceremony.</p>
	<a href="#">Return to Top</a>

<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>02/21 Transit buses idled: supply chain, staffing</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/transportation/more-buses-idled-as-supply-chain-issues-hit-seattle-area-transit/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/transportation/more-buses-idled-as-supply-chain-issues-hit-seattle-area-transit/</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>Buses in need of repair are piling up at King County Metro's bases and the culprits are familiar ones: the supply chain and staffing shortages.</p> <p>Delays in manufacturing and shipping have come for the transit agency, as they have for a broad range of industries, leaving more buses in need of parts the county doesn't have. When the parts do arrive, finding enough skilled mechanics to install them is a stretch.</p> <p>The good news is the larger-than-normal number of idle buses hasn't yet resulted in any canceled routes. But it's another headache for Metro as it grapples with depressed ridership, driver shortages, and public health and safety concerns.</p> <p>"There's no doubt about it: The two major pain points for us is personnel and supply chain," said Thomas Getachew, Metro's vehicle maintenance fleet services manager.</p> <p>King County Metro typically expects about 7% of its fleet to be sidelined for repairs, not including routine maintenance such as cleaning and oil changes. Lately, that number has crept up to 11%, or around 160 buses.</p> <p>The types of missing parts have changed over time. For a while, hoses and belts were tough to come by, said Getachew. Now, the most elusive are the components needed for storing energy in the fleet's hybrid electric engines.</p>



Walking between jacked-up buses in Metro's central base, lead mechanic Craig Phinney points to a small tank on one coach that holds fluid to help it drive more cleanly. "There's a sensor in these," he said. "I've got about 10 buses that need a sensor, but we don't have any. That's a supply issue."

Some bases are more backed up than others. As of late January, only 3.5% of buses based in Bellevue were out for repairs. Meanwhile, nearly 18% of buses at the Ryerson base near the stadiums were immobile and just under 17% of buses at the south base needed work.

The scarcity of parts is not specific to King County Metro. Monica Spain, spokesperson for Community Transit in Snohomish County, said they've struggled to find hoses, belts and anything with a microchip. To avoid service cuts, the agency has "stockpiled" parts. Pierce County has ramped up its rebuilding department to Frankensteins together transmissions and alternators in-house rather than depend on outside vendors, said spokesperson Rebecca Japhet.

For King County, the issue of finding parts has persisted for months. Some buses have been on the sidelines since August. But the recent snowstorm caused the backlog to grow, as all staff turned their attention to responding instead of doing repairs.

"The public is really benefiting from that [snow] effort, but we pay for it on the back end," said Getachew.

To keep as many buses on the road as possible, Getachew said they've needed to get creative with ordering and repairing. Before, the agency would go to a vendor, who'd source parts from a manufacturer. But as the manufacturers have struggled, the effects have trickled downstream.

In response, Metro has started shopping around, testing new products and ordering as many as they can when it works.

"Most manufacturers want us to stay there and wait for them, but we have to put coaches on the road," he said.

Local agencies also have coordinated more than in the past, said Getachew, trading parts when needed. Metro has also taken to stripping parts out of one bus for use in several others, stretching the materials they have further.

To move the work forward when they do find parts, Metro has elevated employees at a lower classification to take care of simple tasks, like changing lights and wipers, freeing the more skilled mechanics to tackle bigger projects.

Staffing concerns predate the pandemic, as schools haven't been pumping out enough trained individuals to replace those retiring, said Getachew. When the pandemic hit, more workers retired early. Some left following the implementation of the vaccine mandate. At 258 workers, vehicle maintenance is currently down 33 employees from what's considered full staff.

"It's been kind of a struggle," he said. "Everybody's struggling, and we all have to draw from the same pool."

Metro increased its service in October, restoring 36 lines paused during the pandemic. But overall ridership remains at just 40% of what it was in 2019. Returning to normal capacity is likely to be slowed by a shortage of both drivers and mechanics; in a presentation to the Metropolitan King County Council last week, Metro leadership told council members that service in March will not significantly increase as had been previously planned.

It's a struggle, but Getachew is hopeful improvements are on the horizon.

"It's not going to be 100% but we think that by next summer the constraints will kind of calm down a little bit," he said.

HEADLINE	02/21 Spokane Co. sheriff fires deputy 'for lying'
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/northwest/spokane-county-sheriff-fires-deputy-whos-running-to-replace-him/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/northwest/spokane-county-sheriff-fires-deputy-whos-running-to-replace-him/</a>
GIST	<p>A veteran Spokane County sheriff's deputy was fired last Thursday, less than a week after filing paperwork to run for sheriff.</p> <p>Sheriff Ozzie Knezovich said he terminated Deputy Craig Chamberlin for lying during an internal investigation last year, an accusation Chamberlin denies.</p> <p>Knezovich said the internal investigation was the second in 2021 examining actions taken by Chamberlin.</p> <p>Chamberlin said he believes the firing was politically motivated. Knezovich has said he won't run for a fifth term in this year's election and has endorsed Spokane County Undersheriff John Nowels to replace him.</p> <p>Chamberlin filed paperwork to run for sheriff with the state Public Disclosure Commission on Feb. 11. In his 22-year career with the sheriff's office, Chamberlin became well-known to the public through numerous TV and radio appearances on behalf of the office.</p> <p>Knezovich said Chamberlin lied about circumstances regarding a character reference letter Chamberlin wrote for his daughter's club volleyball coach, who is facing a felony child pornography charge. Knezovich said an internal investigation against Chamberlin launched late last year and wrapped up last week, resulting in Chamberlin's firing.</p> <p>Knezovich said Chamberlin acknowledged in his letter, which Chamberlin said he wrote Sept. 5, that he knew about the charge the coach was facing before he wrote the letter. Each time investigators spoke with Chamberlin his story changed, Knezovich said.</p> <p>Chamberlin, who denied that he lied, said a handwritten letter he received from the coach in early July requesting a positive reference was "very vague." He said the coach did not specify what he was charged with or where the case was in the judicial process.</p> <p>"The thing I can't wrap my brain around is I was terminated for something that I had absolutely nothing to do with," Chamberlin said of the criminal investigation into the coach. "I was not part of the investigation. I had no knowledge there was even an investigation until I received the letter from coach."</p> <p>Chamberlin said he was "sick to my stomach" when he heard the accusation against the coach, whom he has known since high school, because he stuck up for him with his reference letter. He said he regrets writing the letter.</p> <p>Chamberlin also violated sheriff's office policies in early 2021 when he allowed his girlfriend at the time to take a sleeping pill that was prescribed to Chamberlin. Chamberlin said providing her the medication was a mistake.</p> <p>Knezovich said prosecutors declined to prosecute Chamberlin for the alleged crime, which would have been delivery of a controlled substance. Knezovich suspended Chamberlin for 40 hours but said he would have fired him had he been prosecuted.</p> <p>Knezovich said Chamberlin's claim that his firing was about politics is "just another lie." Knezovich said Chamberlin knew he was under investigation since November and that it would likely lead to his termination.</p>

	<p>“This had nothing to do with politics,” Knezovich said. “I’m not running for sheriff, and it’s up to the citizens of this county now to choose the best and the brightest to run this agency, and I can tell you that Craig Chamberlin is not that.”</p> <p>Chamberlin said it’s completely false that he knew he would likely be fired at the end of the investigation.</p> <p>“I think Sheriff Knezovich has so much hatred and dislike toward me he would do anything he could to keep me from winning the election,” Chamberlin said.</p> <p>Chamberlin, who filed to run for sheriff this month, has been with the sheriff’s office since before Knezovich assumed the head of the department in 2006. He said his relationship with Knezovich was positive initially.</p> <p>“I don’t know where his dislike for me came from,” Chamberlin said.</p> <p>Chamberlin, a divorced father with three daughters, said he will run a positive campaign.</p> <p>“I’m not going to throw mud,” Chamberlin said. “That’s not my style. I’m going to stay positive just like I have my entire career.”</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>02/21 Covid itself a risk factor for heart disease</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2022/02/21/covid-cardiac-issues-longterm/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2022/02/21/covid-cardiac-issues-longterm/</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>Five months after being infected with the coronavirus, Nicole Murphy’s pulse rate is going berserk. Normally in the 70s, which is ideal, it has been jumping to 160, 170 and sometimes 210 beats per minute even when she is at rest – putting her at risk of a heart attack, heart failure or stroke.</p> <p>No one seems to be able to pinpoint why. She’s only 44, never had heart issues, and when a cardiologist near her hometown of Wellsville, Ohio, ran all of the standard tests, “he literally threw up his hands when he saw the results,” she recalled. Her blood pressure was perfect, there were no signs of clogged arteries, and her heart was expanding and contracting well.</p> <p>Murphy’s boomeranging heart rate is one of a number of mysterious conditions afflicting Americans weeks or months after coronavirus infections that suggest the potential of a looming cardiac crisis.</p> <p>A pivotal study that looked at health records of more than 153,000 U.S. veterans published this month in Nature Medicine found that their risk of cardiovascular disease of all types increased substantially in the year following infection, even when they had mild cases. The population studied was mostly White and male, but the patterns held even when the researchers analyzed women and people of color separately. When experts factor in the heart damage probably suffered by people who put off medical care, more sedentary lifestyles and eating changes, not to mention the stress of the pandemic, they estimate there may be millions of new onset cardiac cases related to the virus, plus a worsening of disease for many already affected.</p> <p>“We are expecting a tidal wave of cardiovascular events in the coming years from direct and indirect causes of covid,” said Donald Lloyd-Jones, president of the American Heart Association.</p> <p>In February 2020, the National Institutes of Health launched an initiative to look at the causes and possible treatments for long covid, the constellation of symptoms from brain fog and exercise fatigue to heart-related issues that some people experience well past their initial infections. In addition, the American College of Cardiology has recognized the serious, longer-term effects of the coronavirus by preparing new guidelines, scheduled out in March, for monitoring and returning to exercise after infection. But many experts and patient advocacy groups say more is needed, and are calling on President Joe Biden and other</p>

leaders for comprehensive changes in the health care system that would provide more funding for research and treatment, financial support for people who can no longer work and address the social and emotional consequences of illness in the decades to come.

Zaza Soriano, 32, a software engineer from Millersville, Md., who works for a NASA subcontractor, got COVID right before Christmas despite being fully vaccinated and boosted, and since then, her blood pressure has remained very high with the bottom number, or diastolic pressure when the heart rests between beats sometimes as high as 110 when it should be lower than 80. She also has brain fog and her joints ache.

“It’s so frustrating we still know so little about why this is happening,” she said.

Ziyad Al-Aly, an assistant professor of medicine at Washington University and a Veterans Affairs physician who co-authored the Nature Medicine study, describes the pandemic as an earthquake. “When the earth stops shaking and the dust settles, we will have to be able to deal with the aftermath on heart and other organ systems,” he said.

“Governments around the world need to pay attention,” Al-Aly emphasized. “We are not sufficiently prepared.”

---

Heart disease is the planet’s No. 1 killer, responsible for 17.9 million deaths, or a third of the total each year before the pandemic, and there’s already growing evidence of the outsize impact the coronavirus is having on our long-term health.

Multiple studies suggest that Americans’ collective blood pressures has jumped since the crisis began. According to a December study in the journal *Circulation*, for example, the average blood pressure among a half-million U.S. adults studied from April to December 2020 went up each month for both of the numbers measured by monitors.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as of this month had logged more than 1 million excess deaths or deaths since the start of the pandemic that are beyond what we would have expected in normal times. While most of those were directly caused by the virus, there were also an additional 30,000 deaths due to ischemic heart disease and nearly 62,000 additional deaths due to hypertensive disease.

When the coronavirus first hit the United States in 2020, doctors were surprised by the heart involvement in cases they saw: professional athletes with signs of myocarditis or hardening of the heart walls; patients dying from their illness with hundreds of tiny clots in major organs; children rushed to emergency rooms with an inflammatory reaction involving cardiac complications.

Many of those presentations turned out to be rare or rarely serious. But they led researchers to an important discovery: that SARS-CoV-2 could directly attack the heart and blood vessels, in addition to the lungs.

Myocarditis has mostly been a transient issue, impacting activity or becoming life-threatening in only a small minority of cases; the clotting is more widespread but something that usually can be controlled with blood thinners; and the pediatric inflammatory syndrome has affected only about 6,400 children out of millions of cases, as of January.

The idea that infections increase cardiovascular risk is not new. It has been documented in cases of influenza and other viruses as well. But in coronavirus, that impact seems “enhanced,” said Antonio Abbate, a professor of cardiology at the VCU Pauley Heart Center. And the early and obvious cases, he said, should serve “as a kind of warning” for the type of longer-term cases we may see into the future.

Indeed, as the months since their infections have turned into years, people who initially had mild or even some asymptomatic coronavirus cases are pouring into cardiology practices across the country.

At Memorial Hermann-Texas Medical Center in Houston, Abhijeet Dhoble, an associate professor of cardiovascular medicine, said they are seeing an increase in arrhythmia, an abnormality in the timing of the heartbeat, and cardiomyopathy, a heart muscle disease. The patients, who previously had covid, range in age from their 30s to 70s and many had no previous heart disease.

“We are seeing the same patterns at university clinics and the hospital,” he said.

Two different processes may be at play, according to David Goff, director of the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute’s division of cardiovascular sciences. The virus may inflict direct damage to the heart muscle cells, some of which could die, resulting in a weaker heart that does not pump as well. Another possibility is that after causing damage to blood vessels through clots and inflammation, the healing process involves scarring that stiffens vessels throughout the body, increasing the work of the heart.

“It could lead over time to failure of the heart to be able to keep up with extra work,” he explained.

---

David Systrom, a pulmonary and critical care doctor at Brigham and Women’s Hospital in Boston, said he believes blood vessel damage may be responsible for one of the most common and frustrating symptoms of long covid – fatigue.

Systrom and his colleagues recruited 20 people who were having trouble exercising. Ten had long covid. The other half had not been infected with the virus. He inserted catheters into their veins to provide test information before putting them on stationary bikes and took a number of detailed measurements. The study was published in the journal *Chest* in January.

In the long covid group, he found that they had normal lung function and at peak exercise, their oxygen levels were normal even as they were short of breath. What was abnormal was that some veins and arteries did not appear to be delivering oxygen efficiently to the muscles.

He theorized this could be due to a malfunction in the body’s autonomic nervous system, which controls involuntary actions such as the rate at which the heart beats, or the widening or narrowing of blood vessels.

“When exercising, it acts like a traffic cop that distributes blood flow to muscles away from organ systems like the kidney and gut that don’t need it. But when that is dysfunctional, what results is inadequate oxygen extraction,” he said. That may lead to the feeling of overwhelming exhaustion that covid long haulers are experiencing.

The overall message from providers is that “covid by itself is a risk factor for heart disease” like obesity, diabetes, or high blood pressure, according to Saurabh Rajpal, a cardiologist at Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center.

“This is a virus that really knocks people down,” agreed Nicole Bhawe, a cardiologist with Michigan Medicine and member of the American College of Cardiology’s science committee. “Even young, healthy people don’t often feel very normal for weeks to months, and it’s a real challenge to distinguish what’s just your body slowly healing versus a new pathological problem.”

“People experiencing what appear to be heart issues should have a “a low threshold for seeing their primary care doctor,” she said.

---

Unexplained high blood pressure has been a common symptom after covid infection.

Lindsay Polega, 28, an attorney from St. Petersburg, Fla., had never had any medical issues before covid. She had been an all-state swimmer in high school and ran, swam or otherwise exercised an hour or more every day since. But after two bouts with covid, the first in early 2020 and the second in spring 2021, she's been having what doctors call "hypertensive spikes" that result in shooting pains in her chest that make her shaky and weak. During those incidents, which sometimes occur a few times a day, her blood pressure has gone as high as 210/153 – far above the 120/80, that is considered normal.

One incident happened during a light Pilates class and she had to go to the emergency room. Other times, it has happened while walking. "Sometimes I'll just be on the couch," she said.

Each specialist she saw referred her to another – endocrinology, immunology, cardiology, neurology. Finally, she found herself at a long-covid clinic where the doctor theorized the issue may be with her adrenal gland. Scientists have documented that the virus can target the adrenal glands, which produce hormones that help regulate blood pressure among other essential functions. Polega was put on a heavy-duty blood pressure drug called eplerenone that's typically used in patients after a heart attack, and it has helped to reduce but not eliminate the episodes.

The scariest part for Polega is that women taking eplerenone are cautioned against pregnancy due to research in animals showing low birth weights and other potential dangers. Polega and her boyfriend of six years had recently purchased a house together, and were talking about starting a family soon.

"That's a big thing to have taken away at my age – my future," she said.

Of all the symptoms of long covid, among the most baffling have been erratic heart rates and skipped heartbeats with no clear cause.

Tiffany Brakefield, a 36-year-old pharmacy tech from Bonita Springs, Fla., who had covid in June 2020, said the spikes are so unpredictable that she found herself having to sit down on the floor at Walmart during a recent shopping excursion.

"I felt like I was going to fall down, and all I could do was wait for it to calm down on its own," she said. Her doctors had put her on a heart medication, metoprolol, but it has not helped.

Rick Templeton, a 52-year-old community college instructor in Lynchburg, Va., felt chest tightness along with a racing heart rate, but in his case it disappeared five to six months after his infection in September 2020, and doctors never knew why it happened because his test results were normal.

Rajpal, the cardiologist in Ohio, said a large majority of his post-covid cases are similarly vexing.

"The most common type of long haulers we are seeing have shortness of breath, chest discomfort, and fast heart rate. But when we investigate them for heart disease they come back as normal," he said.

Goff, the NIH scientist, said the presentation looks similar to a condition known as POTS, or postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome, in which symptoms such as lightheadedness and heart rate changes are related to reduced blood volume, typically worsened by changing positions. A body of emerging evidence suggests that for many people, it could be a post-viral syndrome.

He said the unstable heart rate for many post-covid patients "can be quite serious and debilitating, and can really interfere with ordinary day-to-day activities." Doctors can use blood pressure medications to try to stabilize heart rates but because they depress blood pressures at the same time, they can be tricky to use.

Murphy, the Ohio long covid patient, said that when her heart rate soars, which happens several times an hour, she said "it feels like a hamster in my chest."



	<p>Her troubles began on Sept. 5, when she and her teenage daughter tested positive for the virus. Her daughter got over her illness in a few days. Murphy was acutely ill for about three weeks, and many of her symptoms never went away.</p> <p>The 44-year-old single mom says she's extraordinarily weak and has trouble with her memory sometimes. Before she was infected, she worked 12-hour days as a day care provider, a waitress and a cashier. Now she's lucky if she can last three to four hours at her job as a DoorDash driver.</p> <p>She's tried to stay active by taking walks but sometimes "when I take steps, it'll be like stars." When she saw the cardiologist, she passed out during the stress test on the treadmill.</p> <p>"I constantly live in fear I'm going to have a heart attack or stroke," she said.</p> <p>After all her heart tests came back fine except for her EKG, which showed the jumping heart rate, her doctors referred her to the Cleveland Clinic's long covid group. She hopes they will help her find answers.</p>
	<a href="#">Return to Top</a>

HEADLINE	<b>02/21 Canada extends emergency powers</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/blockades-over-but-trudeau-says-emergency-powers-needed/">https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/blockades-over-but-trudeau-says-emergency-powers-needed/</a>
GIST	<p>TORONTO (AP) — Canadian lawmakers voted Monday night to extend the emergency powers that police can invoke to quell any potential restart of blockades by those opposed to COVID-19 restrictions.</p> <p>Lawmakers in the House of Commons voted 185 to 151 to affirm the powers.</p> <p>Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said earlier that the powers were still needed despite police ending the occupation of the nation's capital by truckers over the weekend and police ending border blockades before that.</p> <p>Emergency Preparedness Minister Bill Blair said the protesters were going for the "lifeblood of this nation, which is trade with the United States."</p> <p>Trudeau noted there were some truckers just outside Ottawa who might be planning further blockades or occupations. His public safety minister said there was an attempt to block a border crossing in British Columbia over the weekend.</p> <p>The emergencies act allows authorities to declare certain areas as no-go zones. It also allows police to freeze truckers' personal and corporate bank accounts and compel tow truck companies to haul away vehicles.</p> <p>The trucker protest grew until it closed a handful of Canada-U.S. border posts and shut down key parts of the capital for more than three weeks. But all border blockades have now ended and the streets around the Canadian Parliament are quiet.</p> <p>Ottawa protesters who vowed never to give up are largely gone, chased away by police in riot gear in what was the biggest police operation in the nation's history.</p> <p>"The situation is still fragile, the state of emergency is still there," Trudeau said before the vote.</p> <p>Opposition New Democratic Party leader Jagmeet Singh's party supported it, ensuring Trudeau had enough votes. Singh said they know there are protesters waiting in the surrounding areas of Ottawa and in the capital itself.</p> <p>"They need to be cleared out," said Singh, who also noted there have been convoys that have been intercepted.</p>

“This is an attack on our democracy. This is a group of folks who are very clearly connected to the extreme right wing, The organizers clearly have a goal in mind to undermine democracy. That’s something we can’t allow to continue.”

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police said those who had their bank accounts frozen were “influencers in the illegal protest in Ottawa, and owners and/or drivers of vehicles who did not want to leave the area.”

Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland said earlier anyone affected has an easy way to have their accounts unfrozen: “Stop being a part of the blockade,” she said.

Public Safety Minister Marco Mendicino said allowing police to designate Ottawa’s downtown a no-go zone has been particularly effective. About 100 police checkpoints remain. “We saw calm, peace and quiet,” Mendicino said.

The trucker protests grew until it closed a handful of Canada-U.S. border posts and shut down key parts of the capital city for more than three weeks.

“While we always will defend people’s right to opinion, expression and assembly there are limits to rights when they begin to impact so severely on the rights of others and we saw that here in Ottawa,” said Blair, the emergency preparedness minister. “We also watched with growing concern as part of this protest group starting targeting critical infrastructure when they went to the border at Windsor.”

But all border blockades have now ended and the streets around the Canadian Parliament are quiet.

The protests, which were first aimed at a COVID-19 vaccine mandate for cross-border truckers but also encompassed fury over the range of COVID-19 restrictions and hatred of Trudeau, reflected the spread of disinformation in Canada and simmering populist and right-wing anger.

The self-styled Freedom Convoy shook Canada’s reputation for civility, inspired convoys in France, New Zealand and the Netherlands and interrupted trade, causing economic damage on both sides of the border. Hundreds of trucks eventually occupied the streets around Parliament, a display that was part protest and part carnival.

For almost a week the busiest U.S.-Canada border crossing, the Ambassador Bridge between Windsor, Ontario and Detroit, was blocked. The crossing sees more than 25% of the trade between the two countries.

Authorities moved to reopen the border posts, but police in Ottawa did little but issue warnings until Friday, even as hundreds and sometimes thousands of protesters clogged the streets of the city and besieged Parliament Hill.

On Friday, authorities launched the largest police operation in Canadian history, arresting a string of Ottawa protesters and increasing that pressure on Saturday until the streets in front of Parliament were clear. Eventually, police arrested at least 191 people and towed away 79 vehicles. Many protesters retreated as the pressure increased.

Trudeau said people in Ottawa were harassed for weeks and said billions of dollars in trade were stalled by the border blockades, putting people’s jobs at risk.

The protests have been cheered on in the U.S. by Fox News personalities and conservatives like former U.S. President Donald Trump. Millions of dollars in donations have flowed across the border to the protesters.

“A flood of misinformation and disinformation washed over Canada, including from foreign sources,” Trudeau said.

	“After these illegal blockades and occupations received disturbing amounts of foreign funding to destabilize Canada’s democracy it became clear that local and provincial authorities needed more tools to restore order.”
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>02/21 Mostly unvaccinated dying from Covid</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/Health/dying-covid-unvaccinated/story?id=82834971">https://abcnews.go.com/Health/dying-covid-unvaccinated/story?id=82834971</a>
GIST	<p>When the recent COVID-19 wave fueled by the <a href="#">omicron variant</a> hit the U.S., no one expected it would lead to the number of deaths it did.</p> <p>As of Wednesday, the nation is reporting 2,200 new <a href="#">COVID daily deaths</a> on average. While this is lower than the 3,400-peak seen last winter, it's still three times higher than the number of average fatalities recorded two months ago.</p> <p>Additionally, last winter, vaccines had only just started to roll out, children were not yet eligible and the conversation surrounding boosters was far off.</p> <p>With around 60% of Americans fully vaccinated during the most recent wave, daily deaths from omicron are still relatively high, which begs the question: Who is dying of COVID-19 when there is such strong vaccination coverage?</p> <p>Infectious disease doctors say it is still mainly unvaccinated people, most of whom are in their 30s and 40s with no underlying health issues, who are dying.</p> <p>"The vast majority of patients -- anywhere from 75% and greater -- we're seeing is primarily unvaccinated individuals who are getting COVID and wind up in the hospital severely ill and are currently dying," Dr. Mahdee Sobhanie, an assistant professor of internal medicine and an infectious diseases physician at The Ohio State University, told ABC News.</p> <p>A small percentage of deaths are among fully vaccinated (and boosted) people who are either older or have preexisting conditions that increase their risk of dying.</p> <p><b>Unvaccinated still make up majority of deaths</b></p> <p>Nearly two years into the pandemic, unvaccinated Americans are still making up the majority of COVID deaths.</p> <p>Data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention shows that during the first week of December -- when the omicron variant began taking hold -- unvaccinated people were dying at a rate of 9 per 100,000.</p> <p>By comparison, fully vaccinated people were dying at a rate of 0.4 per 100,000, meaning unvaccinated people were 20 times more likely to die of the virus, according to an ABC News analysis. State-level data, from California to Mississippi, shows similar results.</p> <p>"We started [in 2020] with the most vulnerable deaths among the elderly," Dr. David Zonies, associate chief medical officer for critical care services at Oregon Health &amp; Science University, told ABC News. "As we transitioned into different variants, the age demographic shifted. Now we see very young people dying. It's around 30-year-olds and 40-year-olds."</p> <p>One of those people was father-of-two Christian Cabrera, a 40-year-old comedian from Los Angeles with no underlying conditions.</p> <p>"He's always brought joy and laughter to everybody," his brother, Jino Cabrera Carnwath, told ABC News. "He would be the type of person that would bust out into song in a quiet elevator."</p>

However, he was unvaccinated. Christian feared potential side effects and, because he didn't get sick often, he didn't think he needed the vaccine, his brother said.

But, right after the Christmas holidays, he started to develop symptoms. After attempting to treat himself at home, his oxygen levels began dropping dangerously low.

Christian was taken to Sherman Oaks Hospital, where he was admitted to the ICU and where he remained until he passed away on Jan. 21.

Jino, who has set up a [GoFundMe](#) for Christian's 3-year-old son Noel, said two days before his brother died, he received a text message from Christian in his hospital bed saying he regretted not getting vaccinated.

"He sent me a text saying, 'I can't breathe. I wish I had gotten vaccinated. I really regret it. If I could do it all over again, I would do it in a heartbeat to save my life,'" Jino said. "I think that was his message too to everybody: if you're on the fence, please get all the protection you can, get your vaccine, get your booster."

Dr. Taison Bell, a critical care and infectious disease physician at the University of Virginia, told ABC News many of his unvaccinated patients had similar feelings and regretted their decisions.

When he asked why they weren't vaccinated, they would mostly answer, "I just thought I didn't need to get vaccinated."

"And there are sighs of regret in how they say it," Bell said. "These are preventable deaths now, by and large. The people that we have in the ICU could have avoided hospitals altogether if they were vaccinated."

### **Fully vaccinated people with preexisting conditions also dying**

While most U.S. COVID deaths are made up of unvaccinated people, there is a small percentage of fully vaccinated Americans who are getting breakthrough infections and dying.

Doctors say the overwhelming majority of these cases are among people with underlying conditions, many of whom are on immunosuppressive medications.

"Also, patients who have other medical conditions: obesity, heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, HIV," Sohbanie said. "So, if you have other medical conditions that can also put you at high risk, those are the [fully vaccinated] patients that can wind up getting hospitalized and dying of COVID."

Jeff Sales, a 47-year-old Army veteran and nurse, from Sarasota, Florida, was one of those patients.

He enlisted in the Army at age 18 with the goal of being a medic and served two tours in South Korea, according to his son, Brayden Sales, 22.

During one of those tours, Jeff came down with rheumatic fever, which went untreated for several weeks. This led to a hole in his heart and, at age 22, he had a metal heart valve installed.

After being medically discharged from the Army, he got his nursing degree and was a nurse for more than 15 years, mostly in Utah before the family moved to Florida in August 2020.

"Everything in his life was about helping people and making special connections and doing everything he could for everybody and anybody," Brayden told ABC News.

Although Jeff worked as an orthopedic nurse, his unit had been converted into a COVID unit to deal with the influx of patients. He took several precautions including always wearing a mask and getting fully vaccinated and boosted.

However, on the night of Jan. 20, another nurse told him he was looking pale. Then, he developed chills. He was admitted into the ER and at 6:00 a.m. the next day, his COVID test results came back positive.

Brayden said a few hours later, his father was struggling to breathe, and his condition rapidly declined.

Individuals with heart valves have an increased risk of blood clotting compared to the general population, and one of the side effects of COVID is an additional increased clotting risk. "When his blood thickened up, it caused his heart valve to fail and, when his heart valve failed, he went into complete organ failure," Brayden said. "If it wasn't for his heart valve, it wouldn't have hit him as hard, and he probably would still be here."

On Jan. 21, just 12 hours after testing positive, Jeff died.

Dr. Scott Curry, an assistant professor in the division of infectious diseases at Medical University of South Carolina, called the deaths of fully vaccinated people the "most heartbreaking" to him.

He said, in Charleston, as of Feb. 10, COVID-19 deaths have comprised about 50% severely immunosuppressed, vaccinated patients and 50% unvaccinated patients of all ages.

"When you're a healthy adult who chose not to get vaccinated, you rolled the dice and took your chance," Curry told ABC News. "But when you're immunocompromised, and you live with someone who won't get vaccinated or you're exposed to someone, those are the ones who will die when they get COVID. They are the ones at the greatest risk."

Brayden said he hopes his dad's death encourages others to do what they can to limit the effects of COVID.

"He always was an advocate of doing something to prevent the spread," Brayden said. "If he could get one person to just think about what they're doing and change something to make it so this virus doesn't spread as much, he would be happy."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	02/21 German officials condemn climate protests
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/Technology/wireStory/german-officials-condemn-climate-protests-roads-port-83027340">https://abcnews.go.com/Technology/wireStory/german-officials-condemn-climate-protests-roads-port-83027340</a>
GIST	<p>BERLIN -- German officials condemned protests Monday by climate activists who blocked roads including near the country's biggest port.</p> <p>Members of the group Uprising of the Last Generation glued themselves to roads in Stuttgart, Freiburg and near the port of Hamburg to demand an end to food waste. The group argues that throwing away vast amounts of usable food contributes to hunger and climate change.</p> <p>Bavaria's top state security official said such blockades weren't covered by freedom of assembly.</p> <p>"To massively impede people's mobility or block the movement of goods is a serious breach of the law," Joachim Herrmann of the conservative Christian Social Union told Germany's Funke media group.</p> <p>Omid Nouripour, the head of Germany's environmentalist Green Party, expressed support for peaceful protests but said the blockades could undermine popular support for measures to tackle climate change. He also criticized the activists for threatening to step up their protests unless the government agreed to their demands by last Sunday.</p> <p>Germany is not on track to meet its goals for reducing emissions of planet-warming gases.</p>

	The blockades are reminiscent of the protests last year by the climate action group Insulate Britain, which obstructed many main highways and roads in the U.K.
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	
HEADLINE	<b>02/21 Northern Europe struck by 3<sup>rd</sup> major storm</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/northern-europe-battered-3rd-major-storm-deaths-hit-83025554">https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/northern-europe-battered-3rd-major-storm-deaths-hit-83025554</a>
GIST	<p>LONDON -- Northern Europe has been battered by its third major storm in five days, with heavy rains and high winds killing at least two more people, disrupting travel and prompting hundreds of flood alerts across a region still recovering from last week's hurricane-force winds.</p> <p>Storm Franklin pushed in from the North Atlantic on Sunday afternoon even as crews worked to clear fallen trees and restore power to thousands of customers hit by storms Dudley and Eunice last week. Heavy rains and high winds swept across Northern Ireland and northern England on Monday before moving on to France. England's environment agency issued more than 300 flood warnings and alerts and train operators urged people not to travel.</p> <p>In France, a couple in their 70s died Sunday after their car was swept into the English Channel near a small town in Normandy. The couple had called for help but it did not reach them in time.</p> <p>"With the wind, the car skidded," Herve Bougon, mayor of Briqueville-Sur-Mer, told the Ouest-France newspaper. "It was pushed onto its side as it sank into the water."</p> <p>At least 14 people have died across Europe during a week of wild weather that meteorologists say is being fueled by an unusually strong jet stream over the North Atlantic. The storms have left hundreds of thousands of people without power and triggered local flooding and evacuations as high winds ripped the roofs off buildings.</p> <p>Gusts of up to 87 mph (140 kph) were recorded late Sunday on the Isle of Wight. A gust of 122 mph (196 kph), provisionally the highest ever recorded in England, was measured Friday on the Isle of Wight as Storm Eunice hit the region. Hurricane-level winds start at 74 mph.</p> <p>Official weather warnings in Germany, where the latest storm is known as Antonia, were lifted on Monday, though disruption to transport continued in northern parts of the country.</p> <p>Experts said the weather toll for the week has been extensive for the environment as well. The German Aerospace Center, DLR, says the current storms hitting northern Europe would likely result in widespread damage to already weakened forests.</p> <p>In a study released Monday, the government-funded agency said satellite data shows massive forest loss due to drought and bark beetle infestation between 2018 and 2021. These factors — which are exacerbated by global warming — weaken trees, making them vulnerable, DLR said.</p> <p>"The current storm situation across Germany will probably again lead to the need to remove damaged trees in many areas," it said.</p> <p>Insurance broker Aon estimated the insured damage in Germany from the successive storms at 1.6 billion euros (\$1.8 billion). The Dutch insurers' association estimated that the three storms caused at least 500 million euros (\$567 million) of damage across the Netherlands.</p> <p>Despite preparations and warning by weather authorities, "the February storms have sparked a record number of claims and an enormous damages bill," said Richard Weurding, general director of the Dutch Association of Insurers.</p>

	<p>The storms blew roofs off buildings and uprooted trees across the Netherlands, killing four people on Friday as Eunice lashed the country. Insurers warned that more damage could still be to come with strong winds forecast in coming days.</p> <p>In Denmark, the storm uprooted trees and disrupted rail services in and around Copenhagen, the capital. Sweden saw heavy snowfall that shut down buses in its capital city of Stockholm.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>02/20 Buying condos just got more complicated</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/surfside-tower-collapse-makes-buying-condos-more-complicated-11645289834?mod=hp_lista_pos1">https://www.wsj.com/articles/surfside-tower-collapse-makes-buying-condos-more-complicated-11645289834?mod=hp_lista_pos1</a>
GIST	<p><a href="#">Fannie Mae</a> and <a href="#">Freddie Mac</a> are asking questions about the safety and soundness of condos and co-op buildings after <a href="#">the Surfside, Fla., tower collapse</a>. There is little agreement on how to answer them.</p> <p>Following the <a href="#">June collapse that killed 98 people</a>, the mortgage giants said they would stop buying loans connected to buildings with significant deferred maintenance or safety issues. They have provided lenders with new in-depth questionnaires—to be completed by condo management companies, associations or boards—about a building’s condition.</p> <p>Problem is, the people responsible for filling out the form aren’t sure how to answer all the questions. Some, they say, simply aren’t applicable to their buildings. But lenders, which sell many of the mortgages they make to Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, want detailed answers so they don’t get stuck holding too many loans on their books.</p> <p>“It’s somewhat difficult to answer unless you’re a structural engineer,” said Kevin Hirzel of Hirzel Law PLC, which represents condo associations in Michigan and Illinois. “If you’re just a volunteer board member or property manager, you’re not going to know by looking at the building that it could have a significant issue.”</p> <p>The confusion is slowing down loan approvals and could make it more difficult for condo and co-op buyers to get mortgages, reducing access to affordable homes. The median sales price for previously owned condos and co-ops stood at \$297,800 in January, lower than the median price of \$357,100 for single-family homes, according to the National Association of Realtors.</p> <p>Fannie and Freddie don’t make laws or set building codes. But they wield enormous power in the housing market because they help control the flow of financing to people looking to buy or refinance homes. They package up roughly half the country’s home loans into bonds and sell them to investors with their backing, ensuring buyers can get low mortgage rates.</p> <p>Condo and co-op loans made up about 9% of Fannie’s bonds last year and 7% of Freddie’s bonds, according to Inside Mortgage Finance, an industry research group.</p> <p>The collapse of Champlain Towers South in Surfside showed that many residential buildings had been putting off necessary repairs. The changes Fannie and Freddie rolled out in response added to financial information that condo and co-op representatives were already asked by lenders to provide. Freddie Mac’s requirements go into effect later this month.</p> <p>Spokespeople for Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac said the new measures are meant to protect residents from unsafe buildings and to ensure that aging condos and co-ops are undergoing necessary repairs.</p> <p>A spokesman for the Federal Housing Finance Agency, which regulates the mortgage companies, said the agency “will work with Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac to minimize industry disruptions related to the questionnaires so that condominium associations, lenders, and other stakeholders more clearly understand the requirements.”</p>



The questionnaire is optional, but condo representatives need to find a way to make assurances that the building is in good condition. They say there is little clarity about how much alternative information is acceptable.

Condo and co-op representatives are most concerned about new questions that ask whether a property currently has any structural or safety deficiencies and whether it is anticipated that the project could violate any safety-related requirements in the future, said Dawn Bauman, senior vice president for government and public affairs at the Community Associations Institute, an industry group.

That is leaving people like Mark O'Malley in the lurch. The chiropractor had planned to refinance his Avon, Conn., condo this month at a rate of just under 3%. Dr. O'Malley's condo management company, Imagineers LLC, didn't answer some of the yes-or-no questions on the questionnaire, instead providing a general statement prepared with the help of advisers.

"The questions are so broad that I don't know how you could definitively answer them 'yes' or 'no'," said Karl Kuegler Jr., director of community association management at Imagineers LLC.

Michael Menatian, the president of Sanborn Mortgage Corp., had planned to make the loan and sell it to Citizens Financial Group Inc., which would then sell it to Fannie Mae. But Citizens told Mr. Menatian that the questionnaire needed to be filled out completely for Fannie Mae to buy the loan, he said. The closing, initially scheduled for Feb. 8, is now on hold.

Dr. O'Malley says many of the questions don't apply to his home. "Mine happens to be a single-level condo, and those integrity issues would be impossible," he said.

With rates rising, Dr. O'Malley worries that he will lose his low rate if the situation doesn't get ironed out. Mr. Menatian says that he has since told other prospective condo borrowers that they need to get the form filled out before he starts on the loan.

Ryan Parks, a senior vice president in the mortgage division at Citizens, said the bank moved quickly to adjust its requirements after Surfside. But lenders and condo representatives are "still playing catch up in many instances," he said.

Many condo associations are paying for updated building inspections following the Surfside tragedy, which could make these questions easier to answer in the future, Mr. Hirzel said.

Shayne Wulbert, a real-estate agent at @properties in Chicago, was surprised by her lender's scrutiny of a condo building where she purchased an investment property last month. The condo association was planning coming maintenance.

"That then triggered an onslaught of more questions and scrutiny and a mountain of paperwork that they needed so that they could decide whether the building was financially capable of doing the work," Ms. Wulbert said of the lender. "It was very nerve-racking."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	02/20 Behind China stance, desire protect US ties
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/behind-chinas-warning-against-a-russian-invasion-is-a-desire-to-protect-ties-with-the-u-s-11645376565?mod=hp_trending_now_article_pos2">https://www.wsj.com/articles/behind-chinas-warning-against-a-russian-invasion-is-a-desire-to-protect-ties-with-the-u-s-11645376565?mod=hp_trending_now_article_pos2</a>
GIST	<p>China's more explicit warnings in recent days against a Russian invasion of Ukraine show how Beijing is walking a tightrope, trying to build up a partnership with the Kremlin while preventing its relationship with Washington from becoming outright hostile.</p> <p>A shared interest in confronting the U.S. has driven the China-Russia relationship to its closest point since the early years of the Cold War seven decades ago.</p>

But since Chinese President Xi Jinping this month gave his Russian counterpart his strongest support to date in Moscow's standoff with the West, Beijing has been calling for a resolution of the crisis through diplomatic channels, aligning its position closer to that taken by the U.S. and its allies.

The shift in tone, say Chinese diplomats and advisers to the Chinese government, comes after days of closed-door deliberations by top leaders and reflects Beijing's desire to avoid an even more adversarial relationship with Washington that could cause China to be isolated from the West and hurt the country's development in the long run.

"China still wants to hold together the relationship with the U.S.," said Wang Huiyao, a government adviser and president of the Center for China and Globalization, a Beijing think tank.

Speaking to Europe's pre-eminent annual strategic forum Saturday, China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi [used some of the clearest language](#) yet by a senior Chinese official in seeking to temper a Russian offensive against Ukraine. "The sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of any country should be respected and safeguarded," Mr. Wang told the Munich Security Conference by video link. "Ukraine is no exception."

His comments followed Mr. Xi's remarks three days earlier, when the Chinese leader, in a phone conversation with French President Emmanuel Macron, also called for dialogue to resolve the Russia-Ukraine crisis, remarks indicating a desire not to push European countries further away.

By contrast, when Mr. Xi endorsed Russia's opposition to any expansion by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in his Feb. 4 joint statement with President [Vladimir Putin](#), it left out any mention of Ukraine. That statement was issued when Mr. Putin attended the opening of the Beijing Winter Olympics as Mr. Xi's guest of honor.

Behind the Beijing-Moscow joint stance against NATO enlargement is Mr. Xi's eagerness to show solidarity with Mr. Putin as both countries' ties with the U.S. have soured, according to people with knowledge of Beijing's thinking. Just as Russia is worried about threats to its security from any NATO expansion, one of the people said, China is concerned about "its territorial integrity as a result of the U.S. meddling in Taiwan."

"They feel like they're in the same boat," the person added. Beijing sees Taiwan as Chinese territory and bringing the self-governing island into its fold as part of Mr. Xi's "China Dream" of national revival. However, China's leadership appeared to have underestimated the reaction to the Feb. 4 statement from the rest of the world.

Many in Washington and Brussels saw the entente as one of the clearest signals yet that Beijing intends to join forces with Moscow to reshape the global order closer to their two countries' authoritarian vision. That, on top of Beijing's coercive behavior toward countries from Australia to Lithuania and increased military activities near the Taiwan Strait, has offered more support for President Biden's [effort to work with allies](#) to guard against China.

While tilting closer to Moscow, the Chinese leadership still sees it in its interest not to have the bottom fallout of its ties with the U.S. It needs continued access to American financial and technological resources to ensure economic security and development—an access that could be jeopardized should Beijing decide to help Moscow evade sanctions in the event of an invasion.

"China recognizes its relationship with the U.S. is contentious and competitive," said Bonnie Glaser, director of the Asia program at the German Marshall Fund, a Washington-based think tank. "But they don't want to be pushed into the Russian camp."

Beijing started to make clear its position against an invasion of Ukraine as its topmost decision-making body, the Politburo Standing Committee, reappeared in public view. Over more than a week, the seven-

member group had huddled behind closed doors for discussions, including [how to respond to the Russia-Ukraine crisis](#) and manage China's partnership with Russia without hurting Beijing's own interests.

The latest, more explicit remarks, mentioning Ukraine by name, indicate Beijing for now has settled on a strategy to oppose a Russian invasion of the Eastern European country while continuing to blame the U.S. and its allies for hyping the threats from Russia. In Beijing's view, say Chinese diplomats and government advisers, that serves its interests in preventing outright hostility with the U.S.-led Western world and in maintaining its principle on opposing any country's interference in another country's internal affairs.

Meanwhile, Beijing is set to kick off a series of events to commemorate the 50th anniversary of former President Richard Nixon's [trip to China](#). The seven-day visit in 1972 paved the way for the resumption of diplomatic ties between the two countries and set the stage for China's opening to the world.

The purpose of the events, Chinese diplomats say, is to encourage scholars, business people and others to speak up for the need for continued engagement between the two world powers. As the Biden administration continues a hard line on China started by President [Donald Trump](#), Chinese diplomats have complained about the difficulty in getting meetings with administration officials.

One event planned in connection with the Nixon visit anniversary, for instance, is a roundtable discussion with more than two dozen international business executives, to be held on Thursday by the Center for China and Globalization, the think tank headed by Mr. Wang, the government adviser.

"We'd like to show the room for development in China's market is still huge for American and other foreign companies," Mr. Wang said.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	<b>02/21 Australia: China warship laser incident</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.cnn.com/2022/02/21/asia/australia-china-warship-laser-intl-hnk-ml/index.html">https://www.cnn.com/2022/02/21/asia/australia-china-warship-laser-intl-hnk-ml/index.html</a>
GIST	<p><b>Seoul, South Korea (CNN)</b>Australia is demanding China investigate the alleged use of a laser to "<a href="#">illuminate</a>" <a href="#">an Australian jet in waters</a> off the country's north coast in an incident that threatens to worsen relations between the two countries.</p> <p>Prime Minister Scott Morrison said Monday he'd called on the Chinese government to explain the "dangerous" and "reckless" act allegedly carried out by a People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) warship last week.</p> <p>"This was dangerous, it was unprofessional and it was reckless for a professional navy, and we want some answers as to why they did this," Morrison said. "At worst, it was intimidating and bullying."</p> <p>"They're the ones who need to explain, not just to Australia, but to think of all the countries in our region," he added. "It could occur to anyone else who is just simply doing the normal surveillance of their own Exclusive Economic Zone."</p> <p>Morrison said Monday Chinese authorities had not yet responded to his call for answers.</p> <p>At a regular briefing in Beijing, China's Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin told reporters the ship was abiding by international law.</p> <p>"After checking with relevant Chinese authorities, the information released by the Australian side is not true. The normal navigation of the Chinese ship on the high seas conforms to relevant international law and practice and is completely legitimate and lawful," Wang said.</p> <p>"We urge the Australian side to respect the legitimate rights of Chinese vessels in relevant waters in accordance with international law and stop maliciously spreading false information about China."</p>

Earlier, state-run tabloid the Global Times accused Canberra of trying to damage Beijing's reputation in the South Pacific.

"The Australian military knowingly hyped this with the aim of throwing mud at China," the article said, citing an anonymous analyst.

The paper accused Canberra of trying to draw attention away from the Chinese military's aid efforts in the South Pacific, citing the recent delivery of aid to Tonga in the wake of a large volcanic eruption and tsunami and the shipping of Covid medical supplies to the Solomon Islands.

"Australia does not like China providing concrete benefits to other countries near Australia, so it is finding all ways to discredit China," the story said, citing unnamed analysts.

#### **A defensive act or provocative move?**

The incident in question allegedly occurred last week when an Australian P-8A aircraft, a reconnaissance and anti-submarine warfare plane, was flying over the Arafura Sea, the body of water between Australia's Northern Territory and the island of New Guinea to the north.

The Australian Defense Force said in a statement Saturday the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) vessel used a laser to "illuminate" the Australian plane.

In the Global Times story, China did not explicitly deny a laser was used on the Australian aircraft, but said it would be normal for a warship to use a laser range finder if an aircraft got too close to a vessel.

"Australia failed to tell the public how close its aircraft flew near the Chinese vessels, so people could not tell if the Chinese vessels were forced to take defensive countermeasures," the Global Times said, attributing the statement to Song Zhongping, a Chinese military expert and TV commentator.

In the past, pilots targeted by laser attacks have reported disorienting flashes, pain, spasms and spots in their vision and even temporary blindness.

"During critical phases of flight when the pilot does not have adequate time to recover, the consequences of laser exposure could be tragic," according to a US Federal Aviation Administration document.

Using a laser rangefinder on an aircraft could be considered a provocation as it shows the warship is trying to determine a fire control solution on the aircraft without using the ship's fire control radar, said Carl Schuster, a former US Navy captain.

He said it's possible inexperienced operators on the Chinese ship tried to aim the laser at parts of the plane other than its cockpit and failed.

But Peter Layton, a former Australian Air Force officer and analyst at the Griffith Asia Institute, discounted the possibility of the incident being inadvertent.

"The PLA Navy is a highly disciplined navy and there will be several Communist Party political officers on board to advise the captain and make sure he acts in accordance with Party guidance. This means this is not an accident but is a purposeful act, authorized at the highest levels," Layton said.

The ship that allegedly pointed the laser at the Australian jet was one of two PLAN warships sailing east across the Arafura Sea at the time, the Australian military said.

It released photos of two Chinese ships with the statement, which, according to their hull numbers, were the guided-missile destroyer Hefei and the amphibious transport dock Jinggang Shan.

Australia did not say which of the two ships pointed the laser at the Australian aircraft.

	<p>The incident is not the first report of Chinese vessels pointing lasers at Australian aircraft.</p> <p>In May 2019, <a href="#">Australian pilots said they were targeted multiple times</a> by commercial lasers during missions over the South China Sea.</p> <p>And in a report in June 2018, US military officials told CNN that there were at least 20 suspected Chinese laser incidents in the eastern Pacific from September 2017 to June 2018.</p> <p><a href="#">Military tensions between China and Australia have been on the rise</a>, and spiked in November when Canberra said it was entering a pact with the United States and United Kingdom to acquire nuclear-powered submarines.</p> <p>The day the sub deal was announced, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijan said Australia should "seriously consider whether to view China as a partner or a threat."</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>02/20 San Francisco mayor: city failed kids</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/feb/20/san-francisco-mayor-says-city-failed-kids-should-h/">https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/feb/20/san-francisco-mayor-says-city-failed-kids-should-h/</a>
GIST	<p>San Francisco Mayor London Breed said Sunday that her city failed its kids by not prioritizing returning children to classrooms as the COVID-19 pandemic changed.</p> <p>The Democratic mayor told NBC that voters' decision to recall three members of the city's school board last week reflected a justifiable frustration that the board of education was focused on distractions such as renaming schools that were not as important as returning to the classroom.</p> <p>"We failed our children," Ms. Breed said on "Meet the Press." "Parents were upset. The city as a whole was upset, and the decision to recall school board members was a result of that."</p> <p>Ms. Breed said the conversation surrounding renaming schools was important and she lauded public health officials, but she said school board officials need to deal with challenges such as learning loss and mental health problems exacerbated by COVID and pandemic-related restrictions.</p> <p>Ms. Breed's office has said she has already begun the vetting process for finding replacement appointees.</p> <p>Voters motivated over public education policy ranging from COVID-related restrictions to politics affecting teachers' instruction on issues involving history and race have been on display elsewhere.</p> <p>Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin won his race last year against former Democratic Gov. Terry McAuliffe by making education a focus of his campaign.</p> <p>After last week's school board member recalls, SFGate.com said it obtained Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee material showing Republicans' criticisms of Democrats' handling of COVID were resonating with voters and that a majority of respondents to internal polling thought Democrats in Congress had gone too far in their pandemic response.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>02/21 China sanctions 2 US defense contractors</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/feb/21/china-sanctions-raytheon-lockheed-over-taiwan-deal/">https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/feb/21/china-sanctions-raytheon-lockheed-over-taiwan-deal/</a>
GIST	<p>TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — China said Monday it will impose new sanctions on U.S. defense contractors Raytheon Technologies and Lockheed Martin due to their arms sales to Taiwan, stepping up a feud with Washington over security and Beijing's strategic ambitions.</p> <p>Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin announced the move at a daily press briefing, citing a newly passed Anti-Foreign Sanctions Law that took effect in 2021. It was in response to a \$100 million deal approved by the U.S. for maintenance of Taiwan's missile defense systems by the two companies.</p>

“China once again urges the U.S. government and relevant parties to ... stop arms sales to Taiwan and sever military ties with Taiwan,” Wang said.

“China will continue to take all necessary measures to firmly safeguard its sovereignty and security interests in accordance with the development of the situation,” he said without giving any details.

Taiwan is a democratically self-governed island that communist-ruled China claims as its own territory. The two sides split amid civil war in 1949.

The U.S. has no formal relations with Taiwan but is its main ally. It has increased weapons sales in recent years, angering China with the sales. U.S. law requires the government to ensure Taiwan can defend itself.

Beijing regularly pressures American companies to try to influence U.S. policy.

In October 2020, Beijing also announced sanctions against Raytheon and other defense contractors and “relevant American individuals.” A day later, the State Department said it had notified Congress of plans for a \$2.37 billion sale of Harpoon attack missiles to Taiwan.

It’s unclear what penalties, if any, were imposed. U.S. weapons or military aircraft sales to Taiwan in 2010, 2015 and 2019 drew similar threats of sanctions.

China maintains that U.S. arms sale to Taiwan violates its so-called “one-China principle” and provisions of agreements between Beijing and Washington.

Tensions over Taiwan have been mounting as Beijing has stepped up military activity around the island to try to force concessions from the pro-independence administration of President Tsai Ing-wen. The Communist Party also is using the Chinese mainland’s growing economic weight to pressure other governments to cut diplomatic and unofficial ties with Taiwan.

Raytheon, Boeing, Lockheed Martin and other defense industry giants face controls on sales to China of military and dual-use technologies that have both defense and commercial applications. But they also have major civilian businesses and China is a huge market for aviation, among other industries.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	<b>02/21 Ukraine: urgent EU sanctions on Russia</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/21/ukraine-calls-for-urgent-eu-sanctions-on-russia-to-avert-invasion">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/21/ukraine-calls-for-urgent-eu-sanctions-on-russia-to-avert-invasion</a>
GIST	<p>Ukraine has called for the EU to impose sanctions against Russia immediately, and has won the support of at least one member state, amid scepticism that a proposed summit between Vladimir Putin and Joe Biden can avert a Russian military invasion.</p> <p>At a meeting of EU foreign ministers in Brussels, Ukraine’s foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, had the backing of the Lithuanian government as he argued the bloc should hit the Kremlin with sanctions now.</p> <p>Kuleba said Kyiv backed <a href="#">France’s idea of a summit between the US and Russian presidents</a> but that Moscow needed to see tangible evidence of the west’s resolve to defend his country, which is surrounded by more than 150,000 Russian troops.</p> <p>“There are plenty of decisions that the European Union can take now can make now to send clear messages to Russia, that its escalation will not be tolerated and Ukraine will not be left on its own,” Kuleba said.</p>



“This includes not only political messaging political signals, but also some very specific acts like supporting the development of our defence sector, supporting Ukraine’s cybersecurity imposing some of the sanctions.

“We believe that there are good reasons, good and legitimate reasons, to impose at least some of the sanctions now to demonstrate that the European Union is not only talking the talk about sanctions but also is walking the walk.”

Josep Borrell, the EU’s foreign affairs chief, said the EU would support Ukraine “at the most critical moment, if this happens”, in a sign of the general support among member states for holding back on sanctions for now. “At the right moment I will call an extraordinary meeting,” Borrell said. “But I hope the moment will not come.”

The EU has threatened “severe costs and massive consequences” in the event of a further Russian incursion into Ukraine. The package has yet to be made public but it would involve a block on exports of key electrical components on which Russia is reliant, potentially an import ban on Russian oil and gas, and the freezing of assets of individuals and companies affiliated to the government in Moscow.

Lithuania’s foreign minister, Gabrielius Landsbergis, said he believed the moment for action was now, given the cyber-attacks and the damaging economic pressure being applied on Kyiv by Moscow.

He said: “We believe the attack has already started ... We have to start debating about an answer already to the current situation. Everything we are talking about [is] just waiting for military attack but Russia has a huge arsenal of things it can deploy before a military attack.

“We do not need to wait for a military attack. I can tell you Ukraine is already under attack. First of all, economically. Its economy is already facing huge challenges that are not of Ukraine’s making, they were forced on Ukraine.

“To add to that: the terror campaign. You have to imagine the country is surrounded by a foreign army that is threatening invasion that is already putting a lot of pressure on Ukraine.”

On Sunday, a spokesperson for the French president, Emmanuel Macron, who spoke to Putin twice earlier in the day, said the Russian leader and Biden were willing “in principle” to meet.

The Kremlin’s spokesperson, Dmitry Peskov, said on Monday that a meeting could happen but that there were no concrete plans. He said Putin would address a special session of Russia’s security council imminently.

Germany’s foreign minister, Annalena Baerbock, arriving in Brussels, told reporters: “I appeal urgently to the Russian government, to the Russian president: Don’t play with human lives.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	<b>02/21 Ukraine neighbors bracing; refugee influx</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/21/ukraines-neighbours-bracing-for-millions-of-refugees-if-russia-invades">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/21/ukraines-neighbours-bracing-for-millions-of-refugees-if-russia-invades</a>
GIST	<p>Central European countries on Ukraine’s western border are making preparations for a potential influx of millions of refugees in the event of a major Russian invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>Poland in particular is bracing for various scenarios if Moscow invades Ukraine, according to its deputy interior minister, Maciej Wąsik. “We have to be prepared for a wave of up to a million people,” he told Polish radio.</p>



Poland is already home to about 2 million Ukrainians, many of whom have moved since the 2014 conflict and taken advantage of a relatively easy scheme to gain work permits. The government has said it is planning to house Ukrainian refugees in hostels, dormitories and sports facilities.

Last Saturday, Krzysztof Kosiński, the mayor of Ciechanów, a town in north-central Poland, said on Twitter he had been asked by authorities to indicate “the list of accommodation facilities for refugees, the number of people it would be possible to accommodate, the costs involved and the time for adaptation of buildings with a recommendation of up to 48 hours”.

It is hard to say how many Ukrainians would flee a potential conflict. Many people from the conflict zone in eastern Ukraine have already left for other parts of the country or for Russia, while others have left the country in search of better-paid work.

“Because we now have visa-free travel with Europe, people who wanted to leave have already done so,” said Ukraine’s finance minister, Serhiy Marchenko, in an interview in Kyiv.

“If Russia escalates and people decide to go to Europe to find a safer place, it’s likely to be a smaller portion of people,” he said.

However, there are many different scenarios of how a Russian invasion may unfold, and if the warnings from US and British intelligence of a fully fledged invasion and drive to Kyiv by the Russians come to pass, it seems unlikely to be without huge casualties and displacements.

“We are following the situation very closely; however, the situation remains unpredictable,” said Natalia Prokopchuk, a communications and advocacy officer for UNHCR in Europe.

“In the meantime, the UN and its humanitarian partners in Ukraine hope that the ongoing tensions will not escalate and will be resolved through diplomatic and political means among all concerned parties,” she said.

Other countries in eastern Europe are preparing for a potential influx of refugees if Russia attacks Ukraine.

Romania’s interior minister, Lucian Bode, told TV B1 its government was considering the prospect of “hundreds of thousands of refugees in an uncontrolled influx”.

“We are currently analysing how many refugee camps we can install in a relatively short time: 10, 12, 24 hours. We are analysing existing lodging capacities in border counties but we are also discussing the second stage, with neighbouring counties, and the third stage across the country,” he said.

Slovakia’s interior minister, Roman Mikulec, said his government also stood ready to play a part.

Rights groups have welcomed countries’ willingness to help, but some drew comparisons with the treatment of other refugees, in a part of Europe where politicians have often played on anti-refugee sentiment.

After the Belarusian president, Alexander Lukashenko, organised the movement of refugees with the promise of a safe passage to Europe last year, thousands of people were caught by Polish border guards in the forests near the border and illegally and violently pushed back to Belarus. Late in January, Warsaw announced it has started building a €353m (£293m) wall along its frontier with Belarus, aimed at preventing Syrian and Iraqi asylum seekers from entering the country.

A spokesperson for the Ocalenie Foundation, which supports refugees living in Poland, commended the commitment, but said it showed a double standard. “We wonder why they didn’t do any moves like that during the crisis on the border. This shows a general trend that in Poland some asylum seekers are favoured over others,” said the spokesperson.

	<p>Wąsik described Ukrainians as “real refugees” in need of help and added that his government “absolutely won’t say no to helping them, in line with the Geneva conventions”.</p> <p>Grupa Granica, a Polish network of NGOs monitoring the situation on the border with Belarus, said in a statement: “For almost half a year the same government has violently pushed back people from many other countries trying to cross through Belarusian border. It is racist to differentiate people and their access to basic migration procedures based on the country of their origin. Why don’t they have access to the same treatment?”</p> <p>In the meantime, authorities in the self-declared Luhansk and Donetsk people’s republics have ordered an evacuation ostensibly to protect citizens from a planned Ukrainian attack, although there is no evidence Kyiv is planning any such thing. According to observers, the move appears designed to create a pretext to launch a Russian intervention.</p>
	<a href="#">Return to Top</a>

HEADLINE	<b>02/21 Immigration courts struggle: backlog crisis</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/feb/21/us-immigration-courts-cases-backlog-understaffing">https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/feb/21/us-immigration-courts-cases-backlog-understaffing</a>
GIST	<p>America’s immigration courts are struggling to function at the most basic level, with judges who are already woefully understaffed and often undertrained now overwhelmed by a growing backlog of more than 1.6m cases, industry leaders have warned.</p> <p>The system is so damaged that judges, scholars and attorneys all share concerns about whether immigrants due in court will even receive notice before their hearings so they know to show up and aren’t ordered deported in absentia – an urgent concern made worse by volatile immigration policies at the US-Mexico border.</p> <p>“It’s very worrisome. The fundamental requirement for a full and fair hearing is notice of your hearing and the ability to attend your hearing,” Mimi Tsankov, president of the National Association of Immigration Judges (NAIJ), said.</p> <p>“I see incredible efforts being made by the staff – the bare-bones staff in some courts – to try to support these very, very heavy dockets,” she told the Guardian in an exclusive interview in her union leadership capacity. “But it’s extremely challenging for all of us to meet the demands.”</p> <p>The <a href="#">US immigration</a> court system has been imperiled by dysfunction for decades. Now it’s in crisis after serious setbacks under Donald Trump, and Joe Biden is struggling to right the ship.</p> <p>On the line are millions of futures. Undocumented immigrants who fear being split from their American children and spouses, people facing persecution and death in their countries of origin, or those being sent to countries they haven’t seen in decades are all fighting for fair play and often literally their lives in courts ill-equipped to do them justice.</p> <p>“Let’s make it absolutely clear: due process is suffering,” said Muzaffar Chishti, a senior fellow at the Migration Policy Institute. “There’s just no way around that.”</p> <p>Chishti said he sees all the hallmarks of a strong administrative law system suffering in the nation’s immigration courts, which are housed under the Department of Justice in the executive branch of the federal government, not within the judicial branch.</p> <p>“It is a system in crisis,” he said.</p> <p>After Trump made hardline anti-immigration policies pivotal to his 2016 presidential campaign, he flooded courts with judges more inclined to order deportations, <a href="#">Reuters reported</a>.</p>

His administration hired so many new immigration judges so hastily that the American Bar Association warned of “under-qualified or potentially biased judges”, many of whom [had no immigration experience](#). And as officials such as then-attorney general Jeff Sessions made sweeping [proclamations](#) that “the vast majority of asylum claims are not valid”, judges simultaneously confronted performance metrics demanding they each race through [at least 700 cases a year](#).

Yet in the [roughly 70 US immigration courts](#) across the country, judges are deciding complex cases with [potentially lethal consequences](#).

People ranging from asylum seekers forced to [wait in Mexico](#) to unaccompanied children crossing [the border](#) on foot, to longtime undocumented residents with families stateside end up appearing in court, often without attorneys to help them parse the country’s byzantine laws.

In a process smacking of a zip code lottery, one judge in New York may grant nearly [95% of asylum](#) petitions while [colleagues in Atlanta](#) almost universally deny similar requests, creating a patchwork of standards.

Such inconsistency drives a high appeal rate and clogs the system, experts say. In addition, judges under the [Trump administration](#) lost much of their power to press pause on low-priority proceedings so that they could focus on more urgent cases.

Amid these bureaucratic logjams, the [case backlog has ballooned out of control](#) nationwide in a matter of years, from just over 516,000 cases in fiscal year 2016 to more than 1.6m today, according to data collected by Syracuse University’s Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse (Trac).

“Quarterly growth in the number of pending immigration court cases between October and December 2021 is the largest on record,” [according to Trac](#).

Under Trump, “no progress was made”, said Jeremy McKinney, president-elect of the American Immigration Lawyers Association.

“As a matter of fact, there was significant and historic backtracking,” McKinney said, adding: “All the efforts of the prior administration did was create more litigation.”

Now, Tsankov urgently wants to confront the government with the problems, including the courts’ chronic, severe staffing shortages that can create serious obstacles to fair adjudications.

But amid a bitter, years-long campaign to decertify the NAIJ, the current administration under Biden is not meeting or even communicating with Tsankov’s union, she said.

“If the judges don’t have the staff to send out the hearing notices and to ensure that the cases are ready for proceeding, the mission of the agency isn’t really going to be successfully fulfilled,” Tsankov said.

Neither the courts’ crisis nor widespread frustration over the immigration system writ large are news to the Biden administration.

Kamala Harris last year [acknowledged](#) in an ABC interview that the US immigration system overall is “deeply broken”. But while the administration has [ended](#) many Trump immigration policies, some of the most inequitable remain, such as [forcing migrants](#) to wait in Mexico while their cases are processed in the US legal system and [summarily](#) expelling many with no access to court.

Advocates were also befuddled by the Biden administration’s [early appointments to the immigration courts](#), who were overwhelmingly former prosecutors, immigration enforcement officials and military personnel, [according to the Brennan Center for Justice](#). And while Biden ran on a platform [to double the courts’ staffing](#) and otherwise ease judges’ burden, critics say case numbers aren’t dropping as quickly as they should. In fact, the backlog grew by [roughly 180,000 cases](#) between fiscal years 2021 and 2022.

“When you’re running a court and you know that due process requires that parties have access to their hearings and that they’re aware of when their hearings are going to occur, just hiring more judges will not fix the problem,” Tsankov said.

Judges require legal assistants, judicial law clerks, interpreters and front-window staff – support roles that are critically under-filled in cities as geographically diverse as Philadelphia, Salt Lake City and Memphis, Tsankov said.

At one New York immigration court, for example, Tsankov said they were staffed [at only about 30%](#). Raw migration numbers – US Customs and Border Protection logged an all time record of [1.73m encounters](#) with migrants at the US-Mexico [border in fiscal year 2021](#), for example – don’t tell the whole story.

Apart from policy changes, demographics of those encountered at the border have evolved from men searching for work, who had little access to court, to those seeking asylum who often go in front of a judge.

And immigration enforcement became more closely linked with the criminal justice system in recent decades so that, for example, immigrants stopped for a traffic offense wound up fighting deportation. These factors helped spin the immigration court case backlog out of control.

The result is bare-bones court teams scrambling to keep the system running, risking judges losing track of a case’s legal landscape over time and staff failing to update contact details for hearing notices.

This despite the fact that people can be ordered deported if they don’t show up for court.

It all adds up to courts “suffering from a lack of acceptability, affecting the integrity of the whole system”, Chishti said, adding: “People don’t have faith in it.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	02/20 How Covid changed medicine for the future
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/20/how-covid-created-a-vision-for-treating-disease">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/20/how-covid-created-a-vision-for-treating-disease</a>
GIST	<p>When Tom Pooley, 21, became the first person to receive an experimental vaccine against plague as part of a medical trial last summer after tests on mice, he was inspired by the thought that his involvement could help to rid the world of one of the most brutal killers in human history.</p> <p>“They made it quite clear I was the first human to receive it,” says Pooley, a radiotherapy engineering student. “They didn’t dress it up, but they made it clear it was as safe as possible. There are risks, but they are talented people: it’s a big honour to be the first.” The single-shot, based on the Chadox technology developed by the Oxford Vaccine Group and AstraZeneca, took less than five seconds to painlessly administer, he says. That night, he felt a little unwell, but he was fine within three hours; and the small trial continued apace to combat the centuries-old bacteria threat, which killed 171 in Madagascar as recently as 2017. It uses a weakened, genetically altered version of a common-cold virus from chimpanzees.</p> <p>It is just one example of how scientists are increasingly looking at how Covid treatments can help to treat other diseases. Trials are expected to be developed for other similar jabs against dengue, <a href="#">Zika</a> and a whole host of pathogens. Another vaccine study against Ebola is already going to human trials. As <a href="#">Professor Sarah Gilbert</a>, architect of the Oxford Vaccine, has said: “We’ve got the cake and we can put a cherry on top, or we can put some pistachios on top if we want a different vaccine, we just add the last bit and then we’re ready to go.”</p> <p>The Covid pandemic sparked an unprecedented drive to control a lethal disease whose outbreak led to a near global shutdown to contain its spread. Billions in public and private money were pumped into</p>

research like never before in such a short space of time. It's not something the medical world would have chosen, but the developments of the past two years could not have happened without Covid-19 – the pathogen has served as a giant catalyst ushering in different technologies, data and research that offer insights into other diseases.

The lessons that have been learned – and the new norms that have solidified – will change medical science forever. The world now sits on the verge of a number of potentially significant breakthroughs, mostly thanks to the growing research into hi-tech vaccines, which could benefit patients with cancer and a whole raft of infectious diseases. Meanwhile, new studies into long Covid could shine a light into blood clotting, myalgic encephalomyelitis/chronic fatigue syndrome (ME/CFS) and other conditions associated with the stubborn virus. Obesity and vitamin levels are under the microscope; while digitisation and increased cross-border collaboration could soon reap rewards.

“Covid has stimulated the rapid translation of previous knowledge into practice,” says Independent Sage member and UCL professor of virology, [Deenan Pillay](#). “Developing science takes many years and needs an opportunity to be implemented. Covid has provided an easier regulatory environment, with fast-tracked trials, so vaccine developments, for example, have been really quick.” Until Covid it could take a decade or more for a new vaccine or drug to go through all the development and regulatory stages, he adds, but now they have been rolled out within 12 months of first description of the disease. “Our expectations are now for a much more rapid translation and implementation of scientific advances,” says Pillay. “The caveat to this is the continuing need for equity of access to these advances, which is yet to be seen with Covid vaccines and drugs.”

Just five years ago, there was widespread hesitation to invest in experimental drugs that use synthetic molecules to guide human cells into making specific proteins that can defend against diseases. No product based on mRNA (which stands for messenger ribonucleic acid, and provides recipes to create proteins) technology had ever been approved, but within two years, the rapid development and success of Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna's jabs against Covid were a gamechanger.

***The US big pharma giant*** Pfizer was already working with German start-up BioNTech, which has significant mRNA expertise, on a flu jab before the emergence of Covid. Then focus shifted to developing a vaccine for the pandemic and the pressing need for a treatment to be created accelerated steps into the next frontier – research into treatments based on RNA, a strand of DNA that transfers the instructions needed to make proteins.

“It's been an unforeseen benefit of the pandemic because RNA and mRNA vaccine technology has been researched for at least 10 years,” says [Richard Bucala](#), the Yale school of medicine chief of rheumatology, allergy and immunology. “It wasn't until the pandemic that RNA was really heavily invested in,” he adds. “Vaccine development is empiric: it's very difficult to figure out if it's going to work. It's extremely risky. No one really wants to be involved in research and development. You don't realise it's a failure until you're tens of millions into a trial. But the fortuitous success of RNA tech changed all of that.”

Relative public acceptance of an unusual hi-tech approach has also been key, and approval by a diverse range of regulatory bodies has given both investors and industry confidence. This could open the floodgates to further approvals if the new jabs impress in trials that are being prepared for humans.

Already they have their sights set on another killer disease, malaria, which is estimated to have killed almost half of all people since the Stone Age. It remained a leading cause of global infectious disease death last year: more than 600,000 people, usually young children, died from it.

Bucala's team, in partnership with pharmaceutical company Novartis, succeeded in developing a “self-amplifying” RNA (also known as saRNA) jab for it. The technology stems from a successful RNA malaria vaccine for mice developed at Yale and is in advanced preclinical testing. It could be tested for the first time in humans within two years.

“You can potentially protect against a range of tropical diseases using self-amplifying RNA, which targets a parasite-encoded MIF protein that kills memory cells,” he says. “The self-amplification advancement will create the next generation in RNA vaccines, permitting much lower dosing and the generation of critically needed memory T-cell responses. All of this will unfold in the next five to 10 years.”

Or even earlier: at the start of February, Moderna began their trial for an HIV vaccine that relies on the same mRNA technology as the Covid jab. If they’re successful, a one-off jab will offer lifetime protection. Now this technology is being studied to see if it could help control largely treatment-resistant conditions, such as rabies, Zika, and cancer of the colon, skin, breast and other parts of the body.

[Professor David Diemert](#), an immunologist at George Washington University, says: “The Covid pandemic really demonstrated the success of mRNA vaccines. And so the path from discussing its application for HIV to a Phase I clinical trial happened at an accelerated pace.” [Dr Jeffrey Bethony](#), professor of microbiology, immunology and tropical medicine at George Washington School of Medicine and Health Sciences adds, “This vaccine primes the immune response against HIV by stimulating cells in the lymph node. This procedure is not just unique to Phase I trials; it’s unique for vaccines. It’s very novel.” Moderna alone is developing trials for at least another 30 mRNA-based treatments in six different areas of medicine.

**Meanwhile, there has** been more focus on how to tackle obesity since it has emerged as a leading factor related to Covid – 78% of US patients hospitalised between March and December 2020 were overweight. In June, the first obesity medication approved by the [US Food and Drugs Administration](#) since 2014 hit the market. Semaglutide, also known as Wegovy, could be up to twice as effective as previous weight-loss medications after a study of nearly 2,000 patients saw participants lose on average 15% of their body weight.

The synthetic version of a hormone that reduces appetite was already used in much lower doses to treat type 2 diabetes, but amid growing evidence that substantial weight loss reduces Covid severity, it was greenlighted by regulators. The availability of a drug that can improve both blood glucose and body weight could have far-reaching effects for public health beyond the context of Covid, especially for people who have remained overweight despite their best efforts.

Covid has also shone a light on the potential benefits of vitamin D. In Norway, Finland and Iceland, where there’s an emphasis on maintaining healthy levels of the vitamin, persistently low Covid mortality rates have been observed compared to other northern-hemisphere countries with less of a focus on the sunshine nutrient. Amid the ongoing search to ascertain exactly what makes some people more vulnerable to Covid than others, focus on vitamin D earlier this year led to the publication of a paper in a *Lancet* journal co-authored by dozens of experts, which suggested deficiencies could be a root issue in the development of many diseases

“For participants with vitamin D deficiency, genetic analyses provided strong evidence for an inverse association with all-cause mortality,” it said, calling for wider trials and a fresh look at disease prevention strategies. “There are several potential mechanisms by which vitamin D could be protective for cardiovascular mortality... There are also potential mechanisms implicating vitamin D for cancer.”

Digital health has also come to the fore as a result of pandemic responses. “Use of smartphone applications and the public understanding of data and knowledge of disease prevalence are now widespread,” says Pillay. “People are increasingly accustomed to getting clinical advice at distance, through virtual consultations, while other information collected on apps is sent to medical professionals.” Home testing is also a significant advance, as it allows people to effectively self-diagnose and thus be able to limit their exposure to others. This has come alongside rapid clinical evaluation. “Covid has provided a vision for how best to apply science to health problems in the future,” he says.

**And as more** in-depth research into long Covid is starting to emerge, it is throwing more light on other long-term conditions, such as ME/CFS. The crucial link here could be microclotting, an area [Resia Pretorius](#), head of the physiological sciences department at Stellenbosch University, South Africa, has long been exploring, but the need for further understanding has become even more pressing due to Covid. The



model under scrutiny proposes that small clots in blood capillaries preventing oxygen from reaching tissues may cause long-Covid symptoms.

Pretorius is now leading a study investigating this further, to understand whether microclotting could go some way to unravelling the enigma of long Covid after research in her lab detected significant formations among patients. The preliminary results of her initial research suggested that anti-clotting treatments could help ease long Covid.

“There might be a point of no return for many ME/CFS patients – this might also be the case for long Covid, if you don’t treat early in the disease onset,” says Pretorius, “then the body can become overwhelmed by inflammatory molecules that may cause significant damage. We suspect the reasons why people develop long Covid from a viral infection could be similar to why individuals develop ME/CFS.”  
Advertisement

Pretorius, among many other scientists, has been impressed by the increasing degree of academic and research collaboration – with Covid uniting people from across the globe in a common goal that could endure. “Thank goodness, there’s a lot of like-minded researchers who have joined the endeavours from a variety of big research institutions all over the world,” she says.

If there’s one area of optimism, it is this move towards scientific collaboration and the impressive advances that have emerged in such a relatively short space of time. “It’s been such a horrific time for so many people”, agrees David Braun, an oncologist and scientist focusing on cancer immunotherapies at the Yale Cancer Centre in New Haven, whose team is working to transfer the RNA technology to a cancer jab.

“I hope that some of the scientific advances made during this period might help us to treat other diseases, so that at least there can be one glimmer of hope that comes out of this tremendously difficult situation.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	<b>02/21 Australia reopens international borders</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/feb/21/today-we-rejoined-the-world-hugs-tears-and-vegemite-as-australia-reopens-international-borders">https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/feb/21/today-we-rejoined-the-world-hugs-tears-and-vegemite-as-australia-reopens-international-borders</a>
GIST	<p>There were tears, DJs, Vegemite and drag queens as families, friends and lovers reunited at <a href="#">Sydney airport</a> after the resumption of all international travel to Australia.</p> <p>While a number of expert bodies including the <a href="#">US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention</a> and the <a href="#">European Council</a> have warned against travel to Australia due to soaring Covid-19 case numbers over summer, the federal government has vowed to keep the borders open.</p> <p>The federal minister for trade, tourism and industry, Dan Tehan, who was at the airport on Monday morning, said it was a “great day” for Australia’s tourism industry – battered by years of shutdowns.</p> <p>“It’s been a party out here at <a href="#">Sydney</a> airport,” Tehan said, a bright blue T-shirt emblazoned with the words “Welcome back” visible underneath his suit jacket.</p> <p>“To see the way people have been united – the hugs, the tears – has been wonderful. The future is looking very, very bright.</p> <p>“I’ll do everything possible to keep the border open.”</p> <p>At 6.20am, a Qantas flight from Los Angeles was the first to touch down at Sydney airport, marking the end of 704 days of restrictions on international travel.</p> <p>Fifty-six flights were expected to arrive in Australia on Monday, more than half of them landing in Sydney.</p>



The [New South Wales](#) premier, Dominic Perrottet, said there was a “buzz and excitement” in the air as the state rejoined the world.

“It’s been a long journey, a long journey through Covid,” he said.

“But having our borders open, not just here, but around our country will make a real difference in people’s lives; we’re seeing families being reunited ... international students return.

“Today we rejoined the world, and what a positive thing it is.”

At the arrivals hall, travellers were greeted with koala and kangaroo toys, Vegemite and eucalyptus sprigs, while a DJ atop a bus played Australian hits such as Men at Work’s Down Under and Yothu Yindi’s Treaty.

Friends and family clutched “welcome home” balloons and bouquets as the music played.

Sam Brain arrived on Monday morning from London after two years apart from friends and family.

Her school friend Emma was there to greet her with a tearful hug. Sam was planning to surprise her mother – who’d been fooled into thinking she was catching up with Emma for coffee – later that day.

“It’s been an amazing experience coming back, quite overwhelming with everyone here”, she said. “And a DJ. The whole process getting here was so worrying ... but I’ve made it.

“My mum has no idea, she’s going to have a heart attack.”

Rishm Singh arrived from Toronto in the early morning with her children and couldn’t wait to spend time with her family.

“I was feeling a lot of anticipation – are we going to make it?” she said.

“But we have, and I feel so grateful ... the past two years were horrendous, heart-wrenching.”

Sonnica was arriving from Spain to be with her Australian partner, Jay, after two-and-a-half years apart. The pair met in Spain while Jay was teaching English, and Sonnica said their relationship had survived with lots of phone calls.

“We’ve kept in contact through WhatsApp – technology makes it easier,” she said. “But it’s been hard.”

Yin and Chi Lam were eagerly awaiting the arrival of their daughter Michelle and her baby, due to touch down from New York after almost three years.

The Sydney couple were yet to meet their granddaughter, born 13 months ago during the pandemic.

“We’re so, so excited,” Yin said. “I feel very happy.”

Beside them, drag queens adorned in bedazzled face masks, with sky-high heels and glittering Australian flag capes, greeted arrivals with cheers.

“If you get handed Vegemite, don’t eat it by the spoon,” one told a slightly dazed-looking traveller.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	02/21 Import surge is skipping the train
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-u-s-import-surge-is-skipping-the-train-11645444801?mod=hp_lead_pos12">https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-u-s-import-surge-is-skipping-the-train-11645444801?mod=hp_lead_pos12</a>
GIST	Tens of thousands of container loads of cargo that would normally move on railroads are being hauled on American roads each month as companies look to get around continuing supply-chain bottlenecks.

U.S. intermodal transports, in which railroads carry containers and truck trailers, were down nearly 12% in the first six weeks of this year from a year ago, according to the Association of American Railroads, after tumbling in the second half of last year even as retailers and manufacturers rushed to bring in goods.

Trucking and rail industry officials say demand to move freight 500 miles or more—which is often done by rail—remains strong, as companies restock depleted inventories. But shippers are more often than usual choosing highways over railroads because shortages of labor, equipment and warehouse space across supply chains can create unpredictable delays.

Railroads “should be seizing the day and winning more business,” said Paul Svindland, chief executive of Bensenville, Ill.-based STG Logistics.

Mr. Svindland’s firm has been placing more cargo than usual on trucks because he can’t find enough of the containers railroads need to most easily handle such shipments, he said.

Intermodal transport, which uses trucking for the final leg of delivery, is slower and more complicated than long-haul trucking. But it is also cheaper and less damaging to the environment.

Lawrence Gross, president of Gross Transportation Consulting, said intermodal loads have lost a little over 1% of their market share to long-distance trucking since the Covid-19 pandemic began. Based on current freight volumes, that translates to about 30,000 additional long-distance truck moves each week, he said.

John Gray, senior vice president for policy and economics at the AAR, said freight railroads could comfortably handle an extra 20,000 to 30,000 intermodal loads a week. “I am confident there is a lot more capacity out there,” Mr. Gray said.

U.S. supply chains are struggling to ingest record cargo volumes that began surging into the country in the summer of 2020, a few months after the Covid-19 pandemic triggered lockdowns, when consumers switched their spending from services to goods. Imports were up 14% in 2021 over the year before at the nation’s busiest container port complex at Los Angeles and Long Beach, Calif., clogging port terminals, rail yards, truck yards and warehouses.

Railroads carried record levels of intermodal cargo toward the end of 2020 and through the first half of 2021. But last summer, the system ground to a halt as rail yards in the Chicago area filled with tens of thousands of boxes, backing up shipments at a key hub for transport to destinations east of the Mississippi River.

Rail and trucking industry officials say the congestion was caused by too many boxes flowing into the region for warehouses and truckers to handle, a situation that has popped up intermittently at other intermodal hubs around the country.

Jim Filter, chief commercial officer of Green Bay, Wis.-based trucking and logistics provider Schneider National Inc., said shipping customers took 30% longer than usual, on average, to unload containers last year because their warehouse space was packed and they had too few workers. That tied up the containers and the steel trailers used to pull boxes, making it harder to find equipment already in short supply.

In July, some railroads restricted cargo into Chicago for days until the bottlenecks cleared, pushing shippers to trucking for long-distance routes to inland warehouses. The period coincided with massive bottlenecks at U.S. ports, where container ships at the port complex in Southern California waited weeks or months to unload cargo.

To make up for lost time, some shippers chose to pay more for the certainty and speed of trucking, said Bob Biesterfeld, chief executive of freight broker C.H. Robinson Worldwide Inc.

	<p>“If they’re waiting for days and weeks to get product out of the port and into their warehouse, they’re looking for the fastest way to do that, and ultimately that is almost exclusively by truck,” he said.</p> <p>Truckload volumes moving through the spot market on routes that mirror the nation’s busiest inland route, from Los Angeles to Chicago, were up 130% year-over-year in early February according to DAT Solutions LLC.</p> <p>Such demand is contributing to high trucking rates. Dean Croke, DAT’s principal freight market analyst, said spot rates on the Los Angeles to Chicago routes are up 59% year-over-year, or \$1.04 a mile.</p> <p>But railroad officials say there are signs intermodal freight is beginning to bounce back. Tom Williams, group vice president for the consumer products business unit of BNSF Railway, said intermodal cargo volumes on container ships en route to the United States are up 25% compared with the start of the year.</p> <p>“It hasn’t arrived yet, but it’s coming,” he said.</p> <p>Still, officials warn that without sufficient equipment, truck drivers, warehouse space and workers to process cargo, rail systems could become clogged again.</p> <p>”We need the entire chain to be able to handle it at the same pace so we don’t get into a similar situation where the trains keep coming and the street and the warehouses can’t process it fast enough,” said Elise Gosch, assistant vice president of intermodal sales at Union Pacific Corp.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>02/20 War hinges on 2 separatist enclaves?</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/20/world/europe/ukraine-russia-separatists.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/20/world/europe/ukraine-russia-separatists.html</a>
GIST	<p>STANYTSLIA LUHANSKA, Ukraine — People pass the bare-bones checkpoint dragging wheeled suitcases along the muddy pavement, crossing one of the starkest political divides in Europe today.</p> <p>In pale winter sunshine on Sunday afternoon, Gleb Yegorov, 17, made his way into Ukraine after navigating a half-mile buffer zone and then crossing a pedestrian bridge strung over a ravine. Artillery boomed in the distance.</p> <p>Behind him was the Russian-backed separatist enclave known as the Luhansk People’s Republic, which he said he was fleeing to avoid the draft. He barely made it out, he said, after an eight-hour interrogation on the separatist side of the crossing, and would never go back.</p> <p>“There’s no future for me there,” he said. “They send boys to the front and don’t think about it if they die.”</p> <p>For years, the Luhansk People’s Republic and its fellow breakaway Ukrainian enclave, the Donetsk People’s Republic, were largely ignored. They were just two odd little political entities, Stalinist throwbacks with internal politics too esoteric to merit much attention from the outside world.</p> <p>But now that the biggest war in Europe in decades may hinge on them, it sometimes seems as if Luhansk and Donetsk are all anyone is thinking about.</p> <p>With Ukraine surrounded by Russian forces, Western governments warn that Moscow may use the two Russian-backed republics as the stage for a “false flag” attack on ethnic Russian civilians — and then cite it as justification when they storm across the border.</p> <p>The divide between these mini-states and Ukraine is reminiscent of the Berlin Wall — that is, a separation that grew not out of language or ethnicity but from Cold War-style politics. On one side of the roughly 250-mile frontline is Ukraine, a Western-looking nation aspiring to integrate with European democracies. On the other are about 3.5 million people living in virtual police states.</p>

The worry is that these territories will become the setting for a catastrophe, whether staged or accidental, that could lead to far wider violence. A stray shell, for example, might hit a residential building, or there could be a terrorist attack on fleeing refugees. Whatever the situation, Ukraine would be blamed, and Russia would have a pretext to invade.

Russia, despite repeated accusations from the West, says that it has no intention of invading, and that it simply wants its legitimate geopolitical interests respected.

On Sunday evening, the Ukrainian military issued a statement saying the Russian-backed separatists in the Luhansk region had opened fire with heavy artillery on their own capital city “with the goal of blaming the Ukrainian military.”

“In the absence of any aggressive action from the Ukrainian defenders, the occupiers themselves are blowing up infrastructure in the occupied territories and firing chaotically on towns,” the statement said. Russian news agencies reported artillery strikes in the area. There were no immediate reports of casualties.

While attacking one’s own side to blame an enemy may seem particularly sinister, it would not be the first time it has happened over the eight-year history of the two enclaves.

Analysts have suspected numerous violent events to be false-flag attacks. And insider violence by Russia’s security services or local proxies has been an integral aspect of the republics’ history for years, according to the Ukrainian intelligence services and public statements by comrades of some of those killed.

In recent days, both sides along the eastern Ukrainian front have been making ominous predictions about a mass-casualty event somewhere out in the mining and farming villages — and they are blaming each other even before it has happened.

“The Russian Army and special services are preparing a terrorist attack, the victims of which should be peaceful residents,” the commander of the Ukrainian armed forces, Valery Zaluzhny, warned in a statement over the weekend. “The enemy is seeking to use this as justification to bring in the Russian Army as ‘peacekeepers.’”

On Sunday, the Ukrainian interior ministry released a statement saying the information ministry in the Donetsk People’s Republic was prepositioning film crews at sites of supposedly impending Ukrainian drone strikes. “The purpose of such actions is to demonize the Ukrainian military,” it said.

The Luhansk People’s Republic, meanwhile, said its security service — known as the M.G.B., one version of the name used by the K.G.B. in the Soviet Union — had discovered a radio-controlled car bomb along the route traveled by buses carrying evacuees. The claim could not be independently verified.

Raising tensions, the people’s republics have said they plan to evacuate 700,000 women and children because the Ukrainian Army plans an attack. Western governments have scoffed at the idea that Ukraine would launch an attack just as Russia has amassed, by the most recent U.S. estimates, 190,000 troops near its borders.

Residents of the separatist enclaves who evacuated to Russia had starkly different views of the escalating violence along the frontline, accusing Ukraine of firing artillery into towns on their side.

Ukrainian soldiers “are standing just six miles away from us, and we can hear them very well,” said Lyudmila N. Zueva, 63, as she entered Russia at the Matveev Kurgan border point over the weekend.

The enclaves broke away in 2014, and after they did, to drive into these regions deep in Eastern Europe was to journey into a realm seemingly apart from the contemporary world. Pontoon bridges have been put up beside blown-up highways that trace a route of half-abandoned towns and the sprawling hulks of ruined factories. Overhead, no commercial planes are to be seen. Flights ended in 2014 after a civilian airliner was shot down.

What happens in the republics is something of a black box.

Gaining entry for international journalists can be challenging. And only one international group, an Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe monitoring mission with a weak mandate, has observers on the ground.

But some information has emerged.

The military and civilian leadership has seesawed between Russian citizens with suspected ties to intelligence agencies and local Ukrainians with modest résumés, and it has been upended by a series of violent purges. At various times, senior positions have been held by the owner of a dog behavior school, a man who performed as Santa Claus at a mall, the operator of a Ponzi scheme and a reputed organized crime boss.

As they were sidelined and replaced, separatist leaders blamed the Ukrainian military for assassinations and ambushes that officials in Kyiv, Ukraine's capital, said were entirely homegrown affairs.

Perhaps the most prominent killing was that of the president of the Donetsk People's Republic, Aleksandr Zakharchenko, who died in a restaurant bombing in 2018 that each side pinned on the other.

But other bloody episodes occurred even before that, among them one in which several separatist paramilitary commanders and their supporters were killed in ambushes in 2015. The victim of one attack was a man named Aleksei B. Mozgovoi, a pro-Russian warlord nicknamed "the Brain" whose five bodyguards proved of little avail. Mr. Mozgovoi's press secretary, too, was killed.

One of his comrades in arms, Pavel L. Dryomov, made a video address to President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia, blaming the pro-Russian side for the internecine violence.

"Is this why we intervened? Is this why we died?" he asked.

Mr. Dryomov was soon also killed. The Luhansk People's Republic blamed Ukrainian special forces.

Ukraine's interior ministry estimated that 200 people died in the purges and said Russia's military intelligence agency, the G.R.U., had organized the attacks.

The politics of the enclaves are a blend of Russian imperialism and nostalgia for the Soviet Union. Hammer-and-sickle flags are commonly flown. In government offices, officials hang portraits of Stalin and Orthodox Christian icons.

"When it all started back then, I had a feeling of disconnect with reality," said Maria Paseka, who left the Luhansk People's Republic and moved to the government-controlled side last August. "The puzzle didn't fit together. It felt like everyone around had been told something that I didn't know about."

In Ukraine, Ms. Paseka admitted, "there are things to improve, like the government, salaries, prices, living standards. But it's clear to me where I live now, and that we move to Europe, not falling back into prehistoric times with Russia."

The order last week by the new leader of the Donetsk People's Republic, Denis Pushilin, to evacuate hundreds of thousands of women and children was seen as a particularly ominous signal.

Mr. Pushilin, who stepped in after the assassination of Mr. Zakharchenko, said he anticipated a Ukrainian attack that would kill civilians.

	<p>While thousands of people have boarded buses and evacuated to Russia, some have taken the opportunity to flee West, crossing into Ukraine at the only operating checkpoint: the footbridge and a roughly mile-long stretch of pavement here, where a cease-fire is generally observed to allow civilians to cross.</p> <p>On Saturday, Natalia Kasheyeva, 33, a lawyer, rolled a Day-Glo yellow suitcase across while leading her two daughters, whom she was sending to their grandparents' to get away from the violence.</p> <p>"You feel the pressure," she said of life in the Luhansk People's Republic.</p> <p>Mr. Yegorov, who left to avoid the draft, his green eyes squinting in the late-afternoon sunshine, said he had been living with his grandfather but would now live with his mother in Kyiv. He said he saw right through what he called the phony, Communist-revival politics of the leadership.</p> <p>"Nobody I know," he said, "wants to fight for the Luhansk People's Republic."</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>02/20 US letter to UN: Russia has Ukraine 'kill list'</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/20/world/europe/us-russia-ukraine-kill-list.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/20/world/europe/us-russia-ukraine-kill-list.html</a>
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — The United States government has sent a letter to the United Nations human rights chief in Geneva saying it has "credible information" that Russian forces have compiled a list of Ukrainian citizens to be killed or sent to detention camps in the aftermath of a Russian invasion and occupation of the country, according to <a href="#">a copy of the letter</a> obtained Sunday by The New York Times.</p> <p>The letter, which was addressed to Michelle Bachelet, the United Nations high commissioner for human rights, also said Russian forces planned to carry out widespread human rights violations, which in the past have included torturing and kidnapping civilians.</p> <p>The likely targets would be people opposed to Russian actions, including dissidents from Russia and Belarus living in Ukraine, journalists, anti-corruption activists and members of ethnic and religious minorities and the L.G.B.T.Q. community.</p> <p>"We also have credible information that Russian forces will likely use lethal measures to disperse peaceful protests or otherwise counter peaceful exercises of perceived resistance from civilian populations," said the letter, which was signed by Bathsheba Nell Crocker, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations office in Geneva.</p> <p>Three U.S. officials confirmed the authenticity of the letter and its contents.</p> <p>Foreign Policy first <a href="#">reported</a> Friday on U.S. agencies having intelligence about a Russian "kill list," and the Washington Post first <a href="#">reported</a> on the letter on Sunday.</p> <p>The letter noted that U.S. Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken had raised the human rights concerns to the United Nations Security Council <a href="#">when he addressed that body</a> on Thursday. "In particular, he stated that the United States has information that indicates Russia will target specific groups of Ukrainians," the letter said.</p> <p>In that session, Mr. Blinken told Russian officials they could prove their peaceful intentions to the world by not invading Ukraine and addressing their grievances through diplomacy instead. Mr. Blinken plans to meet Sergey V. Lavrov, the foreign minister of Russia, in Europe this Thursday, unless Russia invades Ukraine first.</p> <p>President Biden and Mr. Blinken have said U.S. intelligence indicates Russian President Vladimir V. Putin has already decided to invade. In recent weeks, Mr. Putin has amassed as many as 190,000 troops around Ukraine. Russia-backed insurgents in the east have increased their artillery shelling of Ukrainian military forces in recent days.</p>

	Mr. Putin invaded parts of Ukraine in 2014 and annexed the country's Crimean Peninsula. Mr. Biden has promised <a href="#">to impose harsh economic sanctions</a> on Russia if Mr. Putin carries out another invasion.
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>02/21 Black farmers fear foreclosure; relief frozen</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/21/us/politics/black-farmers-debt-relief.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/21/us/politics/black-farmers-debt-relief.html</a>
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — For Brandon Smith, a fourth-generation cattle rancher from Texas, the \$1.9 trillion stimulus package that President Biden signed into law nearly a year ago was long-awaited relief. Little did he know how much longer he would have to wait.</p> <p>The legislation included \$4 billion of debt forgiveness for Black and other “socially disadvantaged” farmers, a group that has endured <a href="#">decades of discrimination</a> from banks and the federal government. Mr. Smith, a Black father of four who owes about \$200,000 in outstanding loans on his ranch, quickly signed and returned documents to the Agriculture Department last year, formally accepting the debt relief. He then purchased more equipment for his ranch, believing that he had been given a financial lifeline.</p> <p>Instead, Mr. Smith has fallen deeper into debt. Months after signing the paperwork he received a notice informing him that the federal government intended to “accelerate” foreclosure on his 46-acre property and cattle if he did not start making payments on the loans he believed had been forgiven.</p> <p>“I trusted the government that we had a deal, and down here at the end of the day, the rug gets pulled out from under me,” Mr. Smith, 43, said in an interview.</p> <p>Black farmers across the nation have yet to see any of Mr. Biden’s promised relief. While the president has pledged to pursue policies to promote racial equity and correct decades of discrimination, legal issues have complicated that goal.</p> <p>In May 2021, the Agriculture Department started sending letters to borrowers who were eligible to have their debt cleared, asking them to sign and return forms confirming their balances. The payments, which also are supposed to cover tax liabilities and fees associated with clearing the debt, were expected to come in phases beginning in June.</p> <p>But the entire initiative has been stymied amid lawsuits from white farmers and groups representing them that questioned whether the government could offer debt relief based on race.</p> <p>Courts in Wisconsin and Florida have issued preliminary injunctions against the initiative, siding with plaintiffs who argued that the debt relief amounted to discrimination and could therefore be illegal. A class-action lawsuit against the U.S.D.A. is proceeding in Texas this year.</p> <p>The Biden administration has not appealed the injunctions but a spokeswoman for the Agriculture Department said it was continuing to defend the program in the courts as the cases move forward.</p> <p>The legal limbo has created new and unexpected financial strains for Black farmers, many of whom have been unable to make investments in their businesses given ongoing uncertainty about their debt loads. It also poses a political problem for Mr. Biden, who was propelled to power by Black voters and now must make good on promises to improve their fortunes.</p> <p>The law was intended to help remedy years of discrimination that nonwhite farmers have endured, including land theft and the rejection of loan applications by banks and the federal government. The program designated aid to about 15,000 borrowers who receive loans directly from the federal government or have their bank loans guaranteed by the U.S.D.A. Those eligible included farmers and ranchers who have been subject to racial or ethnic prejudice, including those who are Black, Native American, Alaskan Native, Asian American, Pacific Islander or Hispanic.</p>



After the initiative was rolled out last year, it met swift opposition.

[Banks were unhappy](#) that the loans would be repaid early, depriving them of interest payments. Groups of white farmers in Wisconsin, North Dakota, Oregon and Illinois sued the Agriculture Department, arguing that offering debt relief on the basis of skin color is discriminatory, suggesting that a successful Black farmer could have his debts cleared while a struggling white farm could go out of business. America First Legal, a group led by the former Trump administration official Stephen Miller, filed a lawsuit making a similar argument in U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Texas.

Last June, before the money started flowing, a federal judge in Florida [blocked the program](#) on the basis that it applied “strictly on racial grounds” irrespective of any other factor.

The delays have angered the Black farmers that the Biden administration and Democrats in Congress were trying to help. They argue that the law was poorly written and that the White House is not defending it forcefully enough in court out of fear that a legal defeat could undermine other policies that are predicated on race.

Those concerns became even more pronounced late last year when the government sent thousands of letters to minority farmers who were behind on their loan payments warning that they faced foreclosure. The letters were sent automatically to any borrowers who were past due on their loans, including about a third of the 15,000 socially disadvantaged farmers who applied for the debt relief, according to the Agriculture Department.

Leonard Jackson, a cattle farmer in Muskogee, Okla., received such a letter despite being told by the U.S.D.A. that he did not need to make loan payments because his \$235,000 in debt would be paid off by the government. The letter was jarring for Mr. Jackson, whose father, a wheat and soybean farmer, had his farm equipment foreclosed on by the government years earlier. The prospect of losing his 33 cows, house and trailer was unfathomable.

“They said that they were paying off everybody’s loans and not to make payments and then they sent this,” Mr. Jackson, 55, said.

The legal fight over the funds has stirred widespread confusion, with Black and other farmers stuck in the middle. This year, the Federation of Southern Cooperatives has been fielding calls from minority farmers who said their financial problems have been compounded. It has become even harder for them to get access to credit now, they say, that the fate of the debt relief is unclear.

“It has definitely caused a very significant panic and a lot of distress among our members,” said [Dânia Davy](#), director of land retention and advocacy at the Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund.

The Agriculture Department said that it was required by law to send the warnings but that the government had no intention of foreclosing on farms, [citing a moratorium on such action](#) that was put in place early last year because of the pandemic. After The New York Times inquired about the foreclosure letters, the U.S.D.A. sent borrowers who had received notices another letter late last month telling them to [disregard the foreclosure threat](#).

“We want borrowers to know the bottom line is, actions such as acceleration and foreclosure remain suspended for direct loan borrowers due to the pandemic,” Kate Waters, a department spokeswoman, said. “We remain under the moratorium, and we will continue to communicate with our borrowers so they understand their rights and understand their debt servicing options.”

The more than 2,000 minority farmers who receive private loans that are guaranteed by the U.S.D.A. are not protected by the federal moratorium and could still face foreclosure. Once the moratorium ends, farmers will need to resume making their payments if the debt relief program or an alternative is not in place.

	<p>Some Black farmers argue that the Agriculture Department, led by Secretary Tom Vilsack, was too slow to disburse the debt relief and allowed critics time to mount a legal assault on the law.</p> <p>The Biden administration has been left with few options but to let the legal process play out, which could take months or years. The White House had been hopeful that a new measure in Mr. Biden's sweeping social policy and climate bill would ultimately provide the farmers the debt relief they have been expecting. But that bill has stalled in the Senate and is unlikely to pass in its current form.</p> <p>"While we continue to defend in court the relief in the American Rescue Plan, getting the broader relief provision that the House passed signed into law remains the surest and quickest way to help farmers in economic distress across the nation, including thousands and thousands of farmers of color," Gene Sperling, the White House's pandemic relief czar, said in a statement.</p> <p>For Black farmers, who have seen their ranks fall from more than a million to fewer than 40,000 in the last century amid industry consolidation and onerous loan terms, the disappointment is not surprising. John Boyd, president of the National Black Farmers Association, said that rather than hearing about more government reports on racial equity, Black farmers want to see results.</p> <p>"We need implementation, action and resources to farm," Mr. Boyd said.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>02/21 Guarding India's forests: little pay, high risk</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/21/world/asia/india-forest-rangers.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/21/world/asia/india-forest-rangers.html</a>
GIST	<p>WAYANAD, India — Armed only with a bamboo stick, Bijesh T.K. was part of a team looking for a tiger that had escaped from a wildlife sanctuary. But it was the tiger that saw him first.</p> <p>"It tried to bite my neck, but thankfully my helmet protected me," he said, describing the attack last year near Wayanad, in the southern state of Kerala. "Its jaw was so wide that my whole head could have fit inside."</p> <p>There was nothing his colleagues could do. They tried to shoo the tiger away, but it clamped its teeth onto Mr. Bijesh T.K.'s right arm, refusing to let go, before finally slipping back into the wilderness. His arm was left permanently damaged.</p> <p>Mr. Bijesh T.K. and hundreds of other part-timers across India risk their lives every day for a frontline job that is vital for preserving the country's forests but often pays less than minimum wage.</p> <p>They battle poachers, criminal gangs, fires and other disasters, and in this part of the country, where forests mingle with villages, they are the de facto peacekeepers between humans and wildlife.</p> <p>It's a broad mission that involves deterring wildlife from eating crops and livestock near protected areas, while also guarding both the lives and livelihoods of local residents and the wildlife that could face reprisal attacks by communities.</p> <p>This part of southern India has the largest contiguous tiger population in the world, with more than 720 tigers prowling a biodiversity hot spot in the Western Ghats, moving among at least five tiger reserves that sprawl across three states.</p> <p>This region also has the largest Asian elephant population in the world, and wild elephants are a common sight.</p> <p>"The herd comes trooping through our yard at 7:30 p.m., several days a week," said Lalitha, 72, who uses one name. "We can't grow anything here. If the elephants don't destroy it, then the deer or the wild boar come and eat our fruit and vegetables. We can't step out of the house at night."</p>

Forest watchers, who report to guards recruited at the state level, are typically ill equipped to deal with such situations. They are often members of local communities and Indigenous tribes who traditionally helped with tasks like patrolling protected areas and fighting forest fires.

Mr. Bijesh T.K., 38, received the helmet and a safety jacket only days before he was attacked. That meager protection had been a hasty response to [another mauling by the same tiger](#).

But as a part-time forest watcher, he was not eligible to receive compensation from the Kerala forest department after the attack. The government helped pay for his treatment and continued to pay his monthly salary of \$108. The \$334 he got from a nonprofit group went to medical expenses.

“Foresters need to be given the same respect that our armed forces get,” said Vivek Menon, the founder of the Wildlife Trust of India, which gave Mr. Bijesh T.K. the extra money and has been pushing for [more recognition for frontline staff](#) members.

“They protect vast areas of India’s land, our entire ecological heritage, but many of them are temporary staff who don’t even have life insurance in case they die on the job,” Mr. Menon said.

Before the attack, Mr. Bijesh T.K.’s primary source of income was masonry — work he can no longer do. So, despite his trauma and the relentless nature of the work, he signed up as a full-time forest watcher. But his salary — just \$143 a month — is still desperately low, and he struggles to provide for his family of five.

Each night he’s out chasing away wildlife foraging for food in neighboring villages — mostly elephants, boar and deer but occasionally tigers and leopards. He’s armed with a flashlight and some firecrackers to drive the animals away. In the daytime, he must check the electric fencing that keeps the elephants out and look out for forest fires in the summers.

Most forest watchers are hired as contractors, receiving a fraction of the salary and benefits that permanent government employees earn. Many spend decades working part time.

Interviews with staff members in different regions of the country revealed a similar tale of a system in desperate need of overhaul. While several senior officers spoke of how they were trying to improve the working conditions of frontline staff members, they expressed frustration with a system that seemed designed to hamstring them at every turn.

“Forest staff should be officially designated as frontline staff across the country,” said Gaurav Sharma, a division forest officer in charge of two million acres in Panna, in Madhya Pradesh State. “We did not even get vaccinations on priority when other frontline workers like the police force were getting vaccinated. Many of my staff caught Covid during the brutal second wave last year, and I lost four or five members of my team.”

There is little data on serious injuries to forest watchers in India, but the country has recorded at least 318 ranger deaths since 2012, according to the International Ranger Federation.

In India, many forest staff deaths happen in incidents in remote areas miles away from medical assistance. Guards and watchers typically live in field posts set up inside the forests for weeks at a time. Each beat guard is responsible for 1,200 to 3,700 acres of land.

Depending on budgets, there may be a watcher or two to assist each guard. They are required to patrol the area on foot and get only four days off a month to visit their families. Often the posts don’t have electricity or running water.

In Wayanad, government funding is scarce in part because it is not an official tiger reserve — though, with 120 tigers, according to a 2018 census, it has more of the animals than many marquee tiger

	<p>reserves. Some Wayanad residents oppose the designation over fears that they would be forcefully relocated outside park limits.</p> <p>Many watchers complained of getting paid only for 10 or 12 days a month despite working for nearly 30, not including overtime. In the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, more than 1,200 forest watchers <a href="#">recently filed a plea in the Supreme Court</a>, saying they had not been paid in over a year. Forest workers say they're sometimes frustrated by the lack of support from the communities they serve.</p> <p>"People need to realize that our work is crucial in maintaining biodiversity. Everyone wants more tigers, but nobody wants them in their own backyard," said Mr. Sharma, the official in Madhya Pradesh.</p> <p>As Mr. Bijesh T.K. heads out in the evening to do his job, his family worries about his safety. With his injured arm, he may not survive another animal attack. He has applied to be a permanent forest watcher, which would offer him better pay and benefits, but he hasn't heard anything so far.</p> <p>"Every time I close my eyes, I can see the tiger diving toward me," he said. "But I have no choice. I need to support my family."</p>
	<a href="#">Return to Top</a>

HEADLINE	<b>02/21 Credit Suisse leak: Arab rulers, spy chiefs</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/21/world/middleeast/arab-rulers-swiss-bank.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/21/world/middleeast/arab-rulers-swiss-bank.html</a> <a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/20/business/credit-suisse-leak-swiss-bank.html?action=click&amp;module=RelatedLinks&amp;pgtype=Article">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/20/business/credit-suisse-leak-swiss-bank.html?action=click&amp;module=RelatedLinks&amp;pgtype=Article</a>
GIST	<p>BEIRUT, Lebanon — The king and queen of Jordan had secret Swiss bank accounts worth hundreds of millions of dollars, according to a major data leak from one of Switzerland's largest banks. So did the sons of Hosni Mubarak, the ousted president of Egypt, and business tycoons who thrived during his 30-year rule.</p> <p>Other accounts were linked to spy chiefs from Egypt, Jordan and Yemen who cooperated with the United States and have been accused of human rights abuses.</p> <p>Citizens across the Middle East have long lacked information about the finances of their countries' elites other than what they could glean from peering over palace walls.</p> <p>Now, the <a href="#">data leak from the bank Credit Suisse</a> has opened a peephole into the private wealth of a range of potentates, raising new questions about the ability of elites to turn public posts into private profit in countries where the lack of transparency creates openings for corruption.</p> <p>"What you have is a very sophisticated, corrupt elite that is very integrated into the global financial system," said Nadim Houry, the executive director of the <a href="#">Arab Reform Initiative</a>.</p> <p>Enabling the politically connected to enrich themselves, he said, is the failure of many states to create boundaries between the rulers' and the state's assets.</p> <p>"It looks like a state, it sounds like a state, but ultimately when it comes to the assets of the country," he said, many of the potentates "act like absolute monarchs disposing of personal property."</p> <p>The secret banking information from Credit Suisse was leaked to the German newspaper <a href="#">Süddeutsche Zeitung</a>, and made available to The New York Times and other news organizations by the <a href="#">Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project</a>.</p> <p>The data contains account information over a number of decades and includes account holders' names, the opening and closing dates of their accounts, and their maximum and closing balances. The leaked data</p>

does not include information about the cash flow through the accounts, the source of the funds or the extent of any bank inquiries into whether the money was possibly tainted.

Most of the account holders named in the leak are either out of power or dead, decreasing the chances that the revelations will inspire accountability efforts. But little suggests that officials in power now have fewer avenues for private gain than their predecessors did, Mr. Houry said, despite moves by some countries to increase oversight of government spending after the mass protests against corruption and autocratic rule during the Arab Spring, which spread across the Middle East in 2011.

“Frankly, they have all been window dressing because the power dynamics have not changed and no state controller is able to hold the powerful to account,” Mr. Houry said.

In the years before President Mubarak of Egypt was ousted during an Arab Spring uprising in 2011, a circle of businessmen close to him acquired vast fortunes as Mr. Mubarak privatized state assets and made other efforts to liberalize the country’s economy. His sons, Gamal and Alaa, also got rich.

The Mubarak brothers held six accounts at Credit Suisse, including a joint account that swelled to about \$196 million in 2003, according to the leaked data.

Each of the son’s fathers-in-law also had accounts at the bank worth millions of dollars, as did other businessmen linked to the Mubaraks, whom the Egyptian authorities tried on corruption charges.

As the Arab Spring progressed across the Middle East, the Swiss authorities announced that they had frozen hundreds of millions of dollars of assets associated with Mr. Mubarak and his government as well as assets of people linked to governments in Syria, Libya and Tunisia. But details on exactly what was frozen have remained scarce.

Through their lawyers, Gamal and Alaa Mubarak told The New York Times that all of their assets had been acquired legally through their “successful professional business activities” and properly declared to the necessary authorities.

They said the leaked account information could contain “some material inaccuracies” but did not elaborate.

The only sitting head of state in the leaked data was King Abdullah II of Jordan, a close United States partner whose kingdom has received billions in military and economic aid from the United States over the years. That aid totaled [\\$22 billion as of 2018](#).

According to the leaked data, King Abdullah had six Swiss accounts, including one that held more than \$224 million in 2015. His wife, Queen Rania, had an account that exceeded \$40 million in 2013. Those accounts were closed in 2015 and 2016.

Jordan’s Royal Hashemite Court said in a statement that there had been no “unlawful or improper conduct” in relation to the bank accounts.

Most of the money in the king’s largest account was from the sale of an aircraft in May 2015 for \$212 million, the statement said. The rest was his “personal wealth,” inherited from his father, the previous monarch, and invested since.

Queen Rania’s account held a portion of the king’s personal wealth set aside for the couple’s four children, who were minors at the time, the statement said. The balance leaked was inaccurate, it said, but it did not provide an alternate figure.

The funds were used to buy a smaller aircraft, for investments, personal expenses and social and economic projects for Jordanians and to maintain the Islamic holy sites in Jerusalem that are under the king’s custodianship, the statement said.

The former president of Algeria, Abdulaziz Bouteflika, had a shared account with a number of relatives that held \$1.1 million in 2005, the leaked data showed. He was ousted after 20 years in power in 2019 and [died in 2021](#).

Sultan Qaboos bin Said of Oman, who ruled for nearly five decades until [his death in 2020](#), had two accounts, one that held nearly \$126 million in 2003 and another that held \$57 million in 2015.

The accounts held by the heads of intelligence agencies or their relatives included figures who worked closely with the Central Intelligence Agency on covert operations and counterterrorism and some who have been accused of overseeing torture and other human rights abuses.

In 2003, close relatives of Omar Suleiman, Mr. Mubarak's long-serving intelligence chief and a key interlocutor with the C.I.A., opened a joint account whose balance would grow to \$52 million a few years later, the data showed.

Mr. Suleiman [died in 2012](#), but the account survived Mr. Mubarak's fall and remained open until 2016. Efforts by the reporting project to reach his relatives were unsuccessful.

From 2000 to 2005, Saad Kheir led the Jordanian intelligence agency, a key U.S. counterterrorism partner that human rights organizations say interrogated terrorism suspects for the United States. In 2003, he opened an account whose balance would rise to \$21.6 million before it was closed after his death in 2009.

While it was possible that the money held by the intelligence chiefs was for covert government activities, that the men kept it in their own or their relatives' names suggested it was for personal use, said Douglas London, a retired senior operations officer in the C.I.A.

"These were the right hands and henchmen for the autocrats, so they were well taken care of for their loyalty and their service," he said. "That is just, for better or for worse, how things operate in these countries."

---

The client rosters of Swiss banks are among the world's most closely guarded secrets, protecting the identities of some of the planet's richest people and clues into how they accumulated their fortunes.

Now, an extraordinary leak of data from Credit Suisse, one of the world's most iconic banks, is exposing how the bank held hundreds of millions of dollars for heads of state, intelligence officials, sanctioned businessmen and human rights abusers, among many others.

A self-described whistle-blower leaked data on more than 18,000 bank accounts, collectively holding more than \$100 billion, to the German newspaper [Süddeutsche Zeitung](#). The newspaper shared the data with a nonprofit journalism group, the [Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project](#), and 46 other news organizations around the world, including The New York Times.

The data covers accounts that were open from the 1940s until well into the 2010s but not the bank's current operations.

Among the people listed as holding amounts worth millions of dollars in Credit Suisse accounts were King Abdullah II of Jordan and the two sons of the former Egyptian strongman Hosni Mubarak. Other account holders included sons of a Pakistani intelligence chief who helped funnel billions of dollars from the United States and other countries to the mujahedeen in Afghanistan in the 1980s and Venezuelan officials ensnared in a long-running corruption scandal.

The leak shows that Credit Suisse opened accounts for and continued to serve not only the ultrawealthy but also people whose problematic backgrounds would have been obvious to anyone who ran their names through a search engine.



Swiss banks have long faced legal prohibitions on taking money linked to criminal activity, said Daniel Thelesklaf, the former head of Switzerland's anti-money laundering agency. But, he said, the law generally hasn't been enforced.

Candice Sun, a spokeswoman for the bank, said in a statement that "Credit Suisse strongly rejects the allegations and inferences about the bank's purported business practices." She said many of the accounts in the leak date back decades to "a time where laws, practices and expectations of financial institutions were very different from where they are now."

Ms. Sun said that while Credit Suisse can't comment on specific clients, many of the accounts identified in the leaked database have already been closed. "Of the remaining active accounts, we are comfortable that appropriate due diligence, reviews and other control related steps were taken, including pending account closures," she said.

Ms. Sun added that the leak appears to be part of "a concerted effort to discredit the bank and the Swiss financial marketplace, which has undergone significant changes over the last several years."

The leak follows the so-called [Panama Papers](#) in 2016, the [Paradise Papers](#) in 2017 and the [Pandora Papers](#) last year. They all shed light on the secretive workings of banks, law firms and offshore financial-services providers that allow wealthy people and institutions — including those accused of crimes — to move huge sums of money, largely outside the purview of tax collectors or law enforcement.

The new disclosures are likely to intensify legal and political scrutiny of the Swiss banking industry and, in particular, Credit Suisse. The bank is already reeling from the [abrupt ousters](#) of its two top executives.

With its ironclad bank-secrecy laws, Switzerland has long been a haven for people who are looking to hide money. In the past decade, that has made the country's largest banks — especially its two giants, Credit Suisse and UBS — a target for the authorities in the United States and elsewhere who are trying to crack down on tax evasion, money laundering and other crimes.

In 2014, Credit Suisse [pleaded guilty](#) to conspiring to help Americans file false tax returns and agreed to pay fines, penalties and restitution totaling \$2.6 billion.

Three years later, the bank [paid the Justice Department \\$5.3 billion](#) to settle allegations about its marketing of mortgage-backed securities. Last fall, it [agreed to pay \\$475 million](#) to U.S. and British authorities to resolve an investigation into a kickback and bribery scheme in Mozambique. And this month, a trial got underway [in Switzerland](#) in which Credit Suisse is accused of allowing drug traffickers to launder millions of euros through the bank.

The Justice Department and the Senate Finance Committee are [also looking into](#) whether U.S. citizens continue to hold undeclared accounts at the bank.

Several former Credit Suisse employees told federal prosecutors late last year that the bank continued to hide hundreds of millions of dollars for clients long after its 2014 guilty plea, according to a whistleblower lawsuit filed last year by a former bank official and a lawyer for other former employees. (The suit was dismissed after the Justice Department said it "threatens to interfere with ongoing discussions with Credit Suisse" about dealing with Swiss bank accounts held by U.S. citizens.)

The media consortium has nicknamed the latest leak "Suisse Secrets." Of the more than 18,000 bank accounts involved, roughly 100 U.S. citizens held accounts, but none are public figures.

Among the biggest revelations is that Credit Suisse continued to do business with customers even after bank officials flagged suspicious activity involving their finances.

One account holder was Venezuela's former vice minister of energy, [Nervis Villalobos](#).



Employees in Credit Suisse's compliance department had reason to be wary of doing business with him. The bank had a 2008 report by an outside due-diligence firm detailing corruption allegations involving Mr. Villalobos and Venezuela's state-owned oil company, Petróleos de Venezuela, according to a Spanish police report obtained by the media consortium. (The Times reviewed the report.)

Credit Suisse nonetheless opened an account for him in 2011, the leaked bank data shows. The account, which was closed in 2013, held as much as \$10 million.

Lawyers for Mr. Villalobos, who was [criminally charged by the Justice Department](#) in 2017, didn't respond to requests for comment.

All told, there were 25 Credit Suisse accounts, containing a total of about \$270 million, that belonged to people accused of being involved in a wide-ranging conspiracy surrounding Venezuela's oil company. The accounts remained open after the scandal started to become public, but were closed by the time criminal charges were filed.

The bank also kept accounts open for a Zimbabwean businessman who was [sanctioned](#) by U.S. and European authorities for his ties to the government of the country's longtime president, Robert Mugabe. The accounts stayed open for several months after the sanctions were imposed.

The leaked bank information included many accounts linked to government officials across the Middle East and beyond. The data raises questions about how public officials and their relatives accumulated vast fortunes in a region rife with corruption.

The sons of former President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, Alaa and Gamal Mubarak, held a total of six accounts at various points, including one in 2003 that was worth \$196 million.

In a statement to The New York Times, the Mubaraks' lawyers declined to comment about specific accounts but said the suggestion that any of the Mubaraks' assets had been "tainted by any illegality or a result of any favoritism or use of influence" would be "both unfounded and defamatory."

Any assets they held, the statement said, were from their "successful professional business activities."

King Abdullah II of Jordan, one of the few officials in the leaks who remains in power, had six accounts, including one whose balance exceeded \$224 million.

Jordan's Royal Hashemite Court said in a statement that there had been no "unlawful or improper conduct" in relation to the bank accounts. They held portions of the king's private wealth, which was used for personal expenses, royal projects to help Jordanians and the maintenance of Islamic holy sites in Jerusalem, of which he is the custodian.

Senior intelligence officials and their offspring from several countries that cooperated with the United States in the war on terrorism also had money stashed at Credit Suisse.

As the head of the Pakistani intelligence agency, General Akhtar Abdur Rahman Khan helped funnel billions of dollars in cash and other aid from the United States and other countries to the mujahedeen in Afghanistan to support their fight against the Soviet Union.

In 1985, the same year President Ronald Reagan called for more oversight of the aid going into Afghanistan, an account was opened in the name of three of General Khan's sons. (The general never faced charges of stealing aid money.) Years later, the account would grow to hold \$3.7 million, the leaked records show.

	<p>Two of the general's sons, Akbar and Haroon Khan, did not respond to requests for comment from the reporting project. In a text message, a third son, Ghazi Khan, called information about the accounts "not correct," adding, "The content is conjectural."</p> <p>In 2003, the year that the United States invaded Iraq to topple Saddam Hussein, Saad Kheir, the head of Jordan's intelligence agency, opened an account that would eventually hold \$21.6 million.</p> <p>The account was closed after Mr. Kheir's death in 2009.</p> <p>The family of Mr. Mubarak's long-serving and brutal spymaster, Omar Suleiman, had an account, too. Mr. Suleiman died in 2012. Efforts by the reporting project to reach his family were unsuccessful.</p> <p>The leaked records were provided to Germany's Süddeutsche Zeitung more than a year ago by an unidentified whistle-blower. Of the dozens of news organizations collaborating on the project, none were based in Switzerland, where a 2015 law restricted journalists from writing articles based on internal bank data.</p> <p>The whistle-blower said in a statement to the media consortium that Swiss bank-secrecy laws were "immoral."</p> <p>"The pretext of protecting financial privacy is merely a fig leaf covering the shameful role of Swiss banks as collaborators of tax evaders," the whistle-blower said.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>02/20 Russia seeking pretext to invade?</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/20/world/europe/ukraine-russia-belarus-putin.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/20/world/europe/ukraine-russia-belarus-putin.html</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>KYIV, Ukraine — Russian military exercises on Ukraine's border were extended indefinitely on Sunday, leaving an unrelenting threat hanging over a vastly outgunned Ukrainian military and jittery population after a weekend of shelling and evacuations that American and Ukrainian officials warned was an effort by Moscow to create a pretext for an invasion.</p> <p>The defense minister of Belarus said the war games in the country, which borders Ukraine and where some 30,000 Russian forces were taking part in the drills, would continue because of heightened tensions in eastern Ukraine. Russian-backed separatists in the region have evacuated thousands of civilians ahead of what they said was an impending assault by Ukrainian forces.</p> <p>With an estimated 190,000 Russian forces now massed on their nation's borders and in breakaway areas, Ukrainian officials dismissed any intention of mounting an attack in the eastern Donbas region, where Ukrainian forces and Russian-backed separatists have been locked in a military standoff.</p> <p>After a weekend of scattered but intensifying artillery shelling, the bombardment of the Ukrainian Army in Donbas was at perhaps its highest peak in seven years, stretching along the entire front. American and Ukrainian officials warned that pro-Moscow separatist leaders have been reporting false events or staging incidents intended to provide Russia with an excuse to push deeper into Ukraine.</p> <p>On Sunday evening, the Ukrainian military issued a statement saying the Russian-backed separatists in the Luhansk region had opened fire with heavy artillery on their own capital city "with the goal of blaming the Ukrainian military." "In the absence of any aggressive action from the Ukrainian defenders, the occupiers themselves are blowing up infrastructure in the occupied territories and firing chaotically on towns," the statement said. Russian news agencies reported artillery strikes in the area. There were no immediate reports of casualties.</p> <p>On Saturday, separatist leaders released a video of a man they said was a Ukrainian spy involved in a plot masterminded by Kyiv to retake territory from the breakaway, self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic.</p>

Russia's state-owned Channel One on Saturday broadcast an interview with a man who said he had been tasked with blowing up the car of Donetsk's security chief, as part of a five-day plan to violently reclaim the city and its environs. He said he had smuggled weapons and explosives into the city. The explosion was among the events that precipitated mass evacuations of people living in the separatist republics that began shortly thereafter.

Kyiv has repeatedly denied the allegations.

"This morning, regular portions of lies and new videos about fictional events were flung at us," Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov said Saturday in Munich, during a trip accompanying President Volodymyr Zelensky. "The accumulation of this nonsense only convinces everyone that Ukraine is defending itself from a vicious aggressor who is willing to sacrifice women and children to destroy peace."

He called the ongoing information war between Ukraine and the West on one side and Russia on the other a "clash of civilizations."

Russian propaganda and disinformation, American and Ukrainian officials say, is being used to sow confusion and concoct a false narrative about who is actually threatening whom. The exercises in Belarus, the Biden administration says, are part of a Russian buildup of troops that could be used as a force to invade Ukraine — a step the administration believes President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia has decided to take.

U.S. officials said on Sunday that American intelligence agencies learned last week that the Kremlin had given the order for Russian military units to proceed with an invasion. Officials declined to describe the intelligence in any detail. But the information prompted President Biden to announce that Mr. Putin had made a decision to attack, they said.

Nevertheless on Sunday, Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken, said that President Biden was still willing to pursue diplomacy "until the tanks are actually rolling, and the planes are flying."

The United States government has sent a letter to the United Nations office in Geneva saying it has "credible information" that Russian forces have compiled a list of specific Ukrainian citizens to be killed or sent to detention camps in the aftermath of a Russian invasion and takeover of Ukraine, according to a copy of the letter obtained Sunday by The New York Times. The letter also said Russian forces plan to torture and kidnap people who would be opposed to Russian actions. The Washington Post first reported on the letter on Sunday, and other news organizations reported on a Russian "kill list" last week.

The extension of the military exercises on Ukraine's border came despite repeated assurances from Russia and Belarus that the drills would end this weekend, and it was cited by Moscow's critics as further evidence that Mr. Putin is committed to using his foothold in eastern Ukraine to take over the entire country.

"Russian troops stay on in Belarus violating all guarantees to withdraw," Lithuania's foreign minister, Gabrielius Landsbergis, said in a Twitter post. "It's a clear preparation to attack Ukraine towards Kyiv & creeping annexation of Belarus," which has grown closer to Moscow since its strongman leader violently suppressed pro-democracy protests in 2020.

The growing sense of menace took on added resonance Sunday, eight years to the day when dozens of pro-democracy protesters in Kyiv's central Maidan square were gunned down and killed by forces loyal to a Ukrainian government allied with Moscow.

The massacre helped set in motion a chain of events that led to the ouster of Ukraine's president at the time — and eventually the Russian annexation of Crimea and the eruption of a war led by Russia-backed separatists.

Every year Iryna Horbachova goes to Maidan square on Feb. 20 to commemorate the pro-democracy protesters who were killed in 2014, a fight that feels all the more urgent with the threat of Russian invasion today.

The Maidan was part of an ongoing Ukrainian struggle, said Ms. Horbachova, 36, for “our right to live in the kind of Ukraine we want — not the kind Putin and Russia wants to drive us into.”

If eight years ago Ukrainians could not believe that their own police would shoot civilians in the heart of the capital, today they struggle to believe that a full-scale Russian invasion could be possible. The atmosphere in the country is infused with a mix of determination and trepidation, if not panic.

The Ukrainian military has tried to build itself up in recent years, especially since Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014. The United States alone has provided \$2.5 billion in military assistance that has included high-tech surveillance, communications equipment and drones. In November, the United States delivered about 88 tons of ammunition, part of a \$60 million military aid package pledged by the Biden administration.

But Ukraine remains vastly outmatched by the Kremlin’s forces, and members of Mr. Zelensky’s governing party, Servant of the People, have sought to tamp down fears of a new Russian invasion.

Even if the announcement of the continuing exercises in Belarus was not a prelude to invasion, having the troops so close to Ukraine, has kept the country on edge and inflicted increasing damage to its economy.

For their part, the separatist leaders in the breakaway Donbas region took steps over the weekend to create a kind of carnival-mirror reflection of what was going on elsewhere in Ukraine.

They warned of an imminent threat, called for men of military age to stay and take up arms against a possible attack by Ukraine, and suspended a range of public activities including “leisure, entertainment, entertainment, cultural, exhibition, educational, public and other similar events,” according to a statement posted on their Telegram channel.

The government in Kyiv has repeatedly denied any plans to attack the region, and the rebel leaders produced no evidence to support their claim.

Of the thousands of civilians the separatists evacuated so far, some went to stay with relatives in Russia, while others were temporarily put up in tents by the authorities before being relocated to towns and cities in Russia.

While Moscow has tried to portray the flow of refugees as proof of Ukraine’s menacing posture, the evacuees who passed through the train station in Taganrog, a Russian city perched on the Azov Sea near the border with Ukraine, appeared to be helpless, frightened by the rebel leaders’ warnings but uncertain about what lay ahead.

The Russian authorities “lied to us,” fumed Lyudmila V. Ladnik, 62, who had left her home in Debaltsevo, which is part of the Donetsk People's Republic.

She said that she had been told that residents of the separatist areas would stay temporarily in Rostov, but on Sunday she learned they would be moved farther inside Russia, to a town such as Kursk. With dismay, she wondered whether her evacuation to Russia would be longer than she had expected.

“We are now calling everyone back home, telling them to stay,” she said.

The commander of Ukraine’s Armed Forces said in a statement that refugees are being “used to escalate the situation in order to provoke another round of bloodshed.”

	<p>Ms. Horbachova, on Maidan square, said the last thing she wanted to see in Ukraine was more blood spilled.</p> <p>“For eight years, we have war; for eight years our people have been dying for our identity and for our freedom,” she said tearfully. “Of course there is a feeling of anxiety” as the tension escalates day by day. “But this is not a feeling that is forcing you to pack your bags, it is forcing you to be strong and protect your country.”</p>
	<a href="#">Return to Top</a>

HEADLINE	<b>02/20 Ukraine leader: dangers of appeasement</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/20/world/europe/ukraine-zelensky-munich-conference.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/20/world/europe/ukraine-zelensky-munich-conference.html</a>
GIST	<p>MUNICH — The Munich Security Conference convened this weekend under the banner of “Unlearning Helplessness.” The phrase had ominous echoes with Russia threatening Ukraine, and Volodymyr Zelensky, the Ukrainian president, drove them home by accusing the West of appeasement.</p> <p>“It was here 15 years ago that Russia announced its intention to challenge global security,” Mr. Zelensky said on Saturday at the annual gathering of international policymakers. “What did the world say? Appeasement. Result? At least the annexation of Crimea and aggression against my state.”</p> <p>The mood at the conference — the Davos of foreign affairs, a venue of often bracing conflict — was subdued, almost disembodied, marked by stunned nervousness over the possibility of a European war, diminished by harsh Covid-19 restrictions and missing the Russian participation that has often stirred vigorous debate.</p> <p>The Russian no-show felt ominous, a symbol of a Europe newly divided. Annalena Baerbock, the German foreign minister, put the choice facing the continent starkly: either a “system of joint responsibility for security and peace” or “spheres of influence,” which she compared to the carve-up of Europe into Allied and Soviet spheres at Yalta in 1945.</p> <p>With Russian separatists escalating artillery barrages in eastern Ukraine and Prime Minister Boris Johnson of Britain accusing Moscow of planning “the biggest war in Europe since 1945,” Ms. Baerbock’s reference to Yalta did not seem misplaced.</p> <p>Mr. Zelensky’s comments about the dangers of appeasement were an allusion to a menacing speech in Munich in 2007 by President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia, which revealed the extent of his revanchist ire against the United States. Of NATO expansion eastward Mr. Putin said then: “It represents a serious provocation that reduces the level of mutual trust. And we have the right to ask: Against whom is this expansion intended?”</p> <p>A year later in Bucharest, Romania, NATO leaders issued a summit declaration saying that Ukraine and Georgia, once part of the Soviet imperium, “will become members of NATO.” They did not say how or when because they did not know; and they could not agree on such details.</p> <p>The die was cast. The clock has been ticking since then, with Mr. Putin taking enough military action in Georgia and Ukraine to freeze the countries in strategic limbo, as he awaited his moment to avenge the perceived humiliation of Russia by the West after the Cold War’s end.</p> <p>That moment, he appears to judge, has come. Russia today is bolstered by a strong bond with China; Germany is under new leadership and the United States is weakened by internal fracture. Hence those 190,000 Russian troops, in the American estimate, at the Ukrainian border.</p> <p>At the Munich Conference in 2015, Sergey V. Lavrov, the Russian foreign minister, launched into an extraordinary diatribe against the West. Russia’s annexation of Crimea the previous year was in fact an uprising of people “invoking the right of self-determination,” he said. The United States was driven by an insatiable desire for global dominance and had orchestrated in Ukraine a “coup d’état” in 2014 that led to the ousting of President Viktor F. Yanukovich, a Russian proxy. Post-1989 Europe, Mr. Lavrov</p>

said, had shunned building a “common European house” from Lisbon to Vladivostok in favor of expanding NATO eastward to Russia’s doorstep.

People listened. The Russian fury was striking. But in the end most Western officials shrugged. Surely these were theatrical expressions of Moscow’s festering grievance rather than the first drumbeat of war.

Seven years later, nobody in Munich this weekend dismissed Mr. Putin’s apparent war preparations with, as Vice President Kamala Harris put it, the “foundation of European security under direct threat.”

What will Mr. Putin’s next move be? One consideration is China. It is opposed to NATO expansion and to “attempts by external forces to undermine security and stability in their common adjacent regions,” as a joint Russian-Chinese communiqué put it this month. But Foreign Minister Wang Yi of China [told the conference](#) that “the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of any country should be respected and safeguarded.”

It felt like a pivotal 21st-century moment: China adjudicating a conflict between the United States and Russia.

Whether Mr. Putin will listen is another matter. He may feel confident, in the light of a friendship described this month in the two nations’ joint statement as having [“no limits,”](#) that any Chinese opposition to an invasion of Ukraine will be muted.

The United States has concluded that the Russian president has approved an invasion of Ukraine, with the capital, Kyiv, as the target, and that the probability is low that he will reverse course. Indeed, President Biden has so frequently warned of war that he has irritated Mr. Zelensky, who has seen his economy collapse without Russian soldiers crossing the border.

The inevitability of war was not a view shared by everyone at the conference. Robin Niblett, the director of Britain’s Chatham House, noted that Mr. Putin was normally “brutally measured,” and that a full-scale invasion would be out of character because of its high risk.

France, after another [telephone conversation](#) on Sunday between President Emmanuel Macron and Mr. Putin, said in a statement that the two leaders had agreed on the need “to privilege a diplomatic solution” and “do everything possible to achieve it.” A presidential communiqué spoke of an eventual summit meeting to “define a new order of peace and security in Europe.”

What that could mean, and whether it would in any form be acceptable to the United States and many of its allies, was unclear.

A core issue with which American officials grapple is whether they are dealing with specific, practical and negotiable demands from Russia. Or has Mr. Putin embraced a “theology” that has hardened and now holds that Ukraine must be part of a restored Russian empire, or at least part of its sphere of influence, and can never have a Western orientation or allegiance?

Where forces and weapons systems are positioned can be talked about, even eventually agreed upon. But a mystical Putin theology of Ukraine’s essential Russianness, and the need to bring it under Russian control, will not be accepted, as Vice President Harris made clear. The lesson of the rubble of 1945, she suggested, was that “the rule of law must be cherished” and “national borders not changed by force.”

Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken said the Russian troop buildup had united NATO in its resolve because it threatened “the entire international order” based on principles “like you cannot exert a sphere of influence to subjugate neighbors to your will” and you cannot dictate to another country “with whom it will associate.”

	<p>As for Mr. Zelensky, he appeared deeply concerned that Ukraine would become a pawn in a great power game. “I hope no one thinks of Ukraine as a convenient and eternal buffer zone between the West and Russia. That will never happen,” he said.</p> <p>To counter the temptation of appeasement, Mr. Zelensky urged the West to “effectively support Ukraine and its defense capabilities.” He said that Ukraine should be provided with “a clear European perspective” and that it needed “clear and comprehensive time frames for joining the alliance.”</p> <p>Such a time frame, of course, would never be acceptable to Mr. Putin, who has escalated militarily to prevent just that. “The way Russia escalates is always militarily,” Mr. Niblett said.</p> <p>That is one difference between it and Western democracies, which have made clear no Allied troops will be sent to die for Ukraine and have sought other means to deter Russia, notably through the threat of “massive sanctions.”</p> <p>Appeasement, of course, is a word with a particular resonance in Munich, where in 1938 Neville Chamberlain, the British prime minister, agreed to allow Hitler to annex part of Czechoslovakia to “protect” ethnic Germans there, in exchange for a promise of peace. Mr. Chamberlain declared “peace in our time” on his return to London.</p> <p>But nobody mentioned that at a conference whose mission has been to ensure that the lessons of the 20th century, and its two world wars, are learned.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>02/20 Blitzkrieg or minor incursion?</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/20/us/politics/putin-ukraine-strategy.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/20/us/politics/putin-ukraine-strategy.html</a>
GIST	<p>MUNICH — When President Biden declared on Friday he was convinced President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia had decided to attack Ukraine “in the coming week, in the coming days,” the skeptics among American allies suddenly fell quiet. Hours before, Mr. Biden had informed them that American intelligence agencies had just learned that the Kremlin had given the order for Russian military units to proceed with an invasion.</p> <p>Now the debate has shifted to how Mr. Putin will do it: in one massive nationwide attack; a series of bites that dismantle the country, piece by piece; or a pythonlike squeeze. That last option is made all the easier with the news Sunday morning that <a href="#">Belarus is allowing Russian troops to remain indefinitely</a>, where they can menace Kyiv, the Ukrainian capital. Mr. Putin might be betting that he can shatter Ukraine’s economy and oust its government without having to immediately roll in tanks.</p> <p>Mr. Putin’s strategic choices over the next few weeks may make a huge difference in how the world reacts.</p> <p>If he strikes to take the whole country in a single blow — the approach that senior American military and intelligence officials and many outside analysts now think is the most likely — it could provoke the largest, most violent battle for European territory since the Nazi surrender in 1945.</p> <p>There is little question that the full package of sanctions and technology export cutoffs would be invoked almost immediately. International condemnation would follow, though Mr. Putin may be betting that it would not last long, and that the world would gradually get accustomed to a new, larger Russia reconstituting the sphere of influence that was once the hallmark of the old Soviet Union.</p> <p>“Everything leading up to the actual invasion appears to be taking place,” Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken said Sunday on <a href="#">CNN’s “State of the Union.”</a> “All of these false-flag operations, all these provocations to create justifications — all that is already in train.”</p>



Yet Mr. Blinken held open the possibility of a last-minute diplomatic solution, something President Emmanuel Macron of France tried to get underway Sunday in a phone call with Mr. Putin that lasted one hour and 45 minutes. The French president said a series of meetings would start Monday to try to impose a cease-fire in the Donbas, a Russian-speaking region of eastern Ukraine where women and children were being evacuated after local separatists claimed, falsely, that the Ukrainian government was about to attack them. (The West says such claims are an effort to create a pretext for a Russian invasion.)

Mr. Blinken is currently scheduled to meet Sergey V. Lavrov, the foreign minister, in Europe — but has made clear that the session will be scrapped if Russia begins an attack.

“We believe President Putin has made the decision,” Mr. Blinken said on Sunday, “but until the tanks are actually rolling and the planes are flying, we will use every opportunity and every minute we have to see if diplomacy can still dissuade President Putin from carrying this forward.”

The White House released a statement on Sunday night that Mr. Biden had accepted “in principle” a summit with Mr. Putin after the meeting between Mr. Blinken and Mr. Lavrov, again specifying that it would only take place in the absence of an invasion.

The information passed to Mr. Biden from the intelligence agencies left unclear whether Mr. Putin’s orders would lead to a massive invasion or a more gradual approach that would give the Russian leader more opportunities to exploit fissures just beneath the surface in the Western alliance arrayed against him. He could, for example, test the proposition that Germany or Italy, the two Western European countries most dependent on Russian-provided gas, might falter in their resolve.

Those were the scenarios being discussed most intensely this weekend at the Munich Security Conference, the annual meeting of government ministers, corporate leaders and strategists, where attendees gamed out Mr. Putin’s choices.

“If he is intent on escalating, I don’t think it’s a sudden blitzkrieg to Kyiv and the ouster of the Zelensky government,” said Ian Bremmer, the president of the Eurasia Group, a geopolitical consulting firm. “It’s much more likely to look like a recognition of the independence of the breakaway territory” around Luhansk, in the east.

“You hope, if you are Putin, that leads to more skittishness of some of the NATO allies, less alignment with NATO, more opportunities for Russia to get what it wants without having to go full-scale into Ukraine,” Mr. Bremmer said.

A few weeks ago, some American officials shared that sentiment. Mr. Putin, they noted, presumably wanted to achieve his goal — a halt to Ukraine’s drift toward the West — as cheaply and with as few casualties as possible. All he sought was a friendly, pliable government like the one he has in Belarus, said one senior American official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the continuing diplomatic efforts. The president of Belarus, Aleksandr G. Lukashenko, has tied the security of his country to the presence of the Russian military. (“They will be here as long as necessary,” said Mr. Lukashenko, who is considering inviting Russia to place its nuclear weapons back on Belarusian territory.)

It would be, many suspect, a refinement of Russia’s hybrid-warfare playbook. “Putin has developed and demonstrated over a decade of aggressive action that he knows how to fine-tune gray-scale warfare that is hard to attribute,” said Senator Chris Coons, a Delaware Democrat who is close to Mr. Biden.

“We saw it in Crimea, the combination of covert and overt actions to interfere with and undermine a democratic election,” he added. “But this is a bit different. It’s not hard to figure out what nation these 150,000 troops have come from. And that’s why I don’t think that a lesser invasion — a ‘minor incursion,’ if you want to call it that — would result in a lesser penalty. We’re not in a place anymore where proportionality is a key piece of the argument.”

Mr. Biden briefly floated the phrase “minor incursion” in January, at a news conference. At the time, he suggested that the allies might not impose full sanctions for a modest expansion of the territory Russia already controls around Crimea.

In that case, Mr. Putin might seek to test the international reaction to each step — seeing what kind of punishment, or military resistance, he might face. But almost as soon as the words were out of Mr. Biden’s mouth, White House officials walked them back. The next day, the president declared that any move over the border — no matter how minor — would trigger the full sanctions package.

Still, officials in the Biden administration are discussing with some urgency how the United States might respond to a series of smaller, or less visible, steps by Russia.

Russia could also cripple the Ukrainian power grid and communications systems. Mr. Biden recently sent the deputy national security adviser for cyber- and emerging technologies, Anne Neuberger, to brief the North Atlantic Treaty Organization on what that might look like — and for the possibility that the cyberattacks could spread to Western Europe and the United States.

Another “minor incursion” might be paramilitary activity, or a prelude to a traditional invasion reminiscent of the Soviet Union’s invasion of Hungary in 1956 or Czechoslovakia in 1968. But over the past two weeks, administration officials have publicly shifted their assessment, saying they think Mr. Putin is likely to go big.

About three weeks ago, American intelligence officials picked up more and more evidence that the primary target was Kyiv, a prediction supported by the massing of new troops on the Belarus-Ukraine border, a mere 100 miles or so from the Ukrainian capital.

Whether those troops would just menace the capital from afar, raining rocket attacks on it, or surround it without entering it, to avoid urban warfare, is unclear.

But in briefings to members of Congress and others, the Pentagon and American intelligence officials have described a worst-case scenario that they now consider to be likely: a week or two of terror, constant rocket attacks and street fighting and, ultimately, a hunt for anyone who supported the democratically elected government of President Volodymyr Zelensky.

Mr. Blinken gave a somewhat sanitized version of what that might look like in a speech to the United Nations on Thursday. But the more granular assessments suggest Russia would begin by cutting Ukraine’s internet connections to the outside world, jamming cell and computer networks and frying the communications among Ukrainian military units. Then would come salvos of ballistic missiles, which can already be seen on mobile launchers moved to the Russian and Belarusian borders with Ukraine.

American officials who have had access to some of the Russian planning — they are discreet about how they have obtained it — say that it calls for overwhelmingly intense fire. “We were told to expect tens of thousands of casualties in the opening days,” said one senior official who has received the briefing, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss the intelligence.

Ukraine’s military, far better equipped and trained than it was eight years ago when Russia surprised the world by taking Crimea, would fight back hard, most officials expect. NATO would rush in supplies. The fighting could last weeks, officials were told, before settling into a guerrilla war.

But some intelligence assessments suggest that after that intense fight and installing a puppet government, the Russians might withdraw, to avoid an occupation and the resulting insurgency.

Several of Mr. Biden’s senior advisers said in recent days they were skeptical that such a withdrawal would happen, suggesting that would only lead to eventual uprisings against the government — the kind that took place on the Maidan in Kyiv, also known as Independence Square, exactly eight years ago this

	<p>weekend. Hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians took to the streets there in 2014 and ousted President Viktor F. Yanukovich, who fled to Russia.</p> <p>Mr. Putin remembers those events well. They have led, in many ways, to this day, and this crisis. The American assessment is that he is determined not to let street protesters interfere with his strategy to control the country, and the region, for a second time.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>02/20 National pandemic emergency extended</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/20/us/politics/biden-extends-the-national-pandemic-emergency-first-declared-in-march-2020.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/20/us/politics/biden-extends-the-national-pandemic-emergency-first-declared-in-march-2020.html</a> <a href="https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2022/02/18/notice-on-the-continuation-of-the-national-emergency-concerning-the-coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19-pandemic-2/">https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2022/02/18/notice-on-the-continuation-of-the-national-emergency-concerning-the-coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19-pandemic-2/</a>
GIST	<p>President Biden said on Friday that he would extend the national emergency that was first declared in March 2020 in response to the coronavirus pandemic. The additional authority had been set to expire on March 1.</p> <p>The decision, contained in <a href="#">a letter from Mr. Biden to Congress</a> that the White House made public, comes as a wave of coronavirus cases driven by the highly transmissible Omicron variant recedes in the United States, and many states and localities <a href="#">ease pandemic restrictions</a>.</p> <p>But the pandemic is taking a continuing toll on the country. As of Friday, more than 75,000 Americans were hospitalized with the virus. Deaths, which lag case counts by as much as several weeks, <a href="#">are increasing in 14 states</a>, and remain at almost 2,300 a day nationally.</p> <p>“The Covid-19 pandemic continues to cause significant risk to the public health and safety of the nation,” Mr. Biden wrote in the letter. “More than 900,000 people in this nation have perished from the disease, and it is essential to continue to combat and respond to Covid-19 with the full capacity and capability of the federal government.”</p> <p>A national emergency conveys special powers. It frees the federal government from abiding by some legal constraints, allowing it to spend additional money and more easily take certain actions.</p> <p>The pandemic emergency would have expired had Mr. Biden not alerted Congress of his intention to extend it.</p> <p>President Donald J. Trump <a href="#">first declared</a> the pandemic a national emergency on March 13, 2020. Mr. Trump said that extra measures were needed to combat the virus, which at that time was known to have infected 1,645 people in the United States — a number that now exceeds 78 million.</p> <hr/> <p>Notice on the Continuation of the National Emergency Concerning the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Pandemic</p> <p>FEBRUARY 18, 2022•<a href="#">PRESIDENTIAL ACTIONS</a></p> <p>On March 13, 2020, by Proclamation 9994, the President declared a national emergency concerning the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic continues to cause significant risk to the public health and safety of the Nation. For this reason, the national emergency declared on March 13, 2020, and beginning March 1, 2020, must continue in effect beyond March 1, 2022. Therefore, in accordance with section 202(d) of the National Emergencies Act (50 U.S.C. 1622(d)), I am continuing the national emergency declared in Proclamation 9994 concerning the COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p>This notice shall be published in the Federal Register and transmitted to the Congress.</p>

JOSEPH R. BIDEN JR.  
THE WHITE HOUSE,  
February 18, 2022.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	<b>02/20 Protests closed Blaine border crossing 8hrs</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/protests-saturday-closed-border-crossing-in-blaine-police-investigating-threats-to-media/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/protests-saturday-closed-border-crossing-in-blaine-police-investigating-threats-to-media/</a>
GIST	<p>Protests over vaccine and mask mandates in Canada closed the Pacific Highway Border Crossing, a major route for trucks in Blaine, for more than eight hours Saturday.</p> <p>The Royal Canadian Mounted Police said the crossing closed at about 12:30 p.m. “as a preventive measure.” All traffic was diverted to the Interstate 5 crossing, where delays stretched to about an hour at one point.</p> <p>The RCMP said the majority of protesters were gone at about 8 p.m., and the border crossing was reopened not long after, with vehicle checkpoints and a large police presence remaining in place on the Canadian side. All border crossings were open Sunday morning.</p> <p>Canadian police also said they were investigating several incidents Saturday in which “aggressive protesters” surrounded members of the media reporting on the scene.</p> <p>A reporter for Global News posted video in which he and a camera operator are verbally threatened as they are escorted away from an angry crowd by police.</p> <p>A CTV reporter’s live dispatch was disrupted by a group of screaming people. “One guy actually spit at us, others called us Nazis. ... Then they chased us down the street to our bureau,” the reporter, Glen McGregor, <a href="#">said on Twitter</a>.</p> <p>“These kinds of acts of aggression and intimidation towards media, or any member of the public, are simply unacceptable,” RCMP Sgt. Elenore Sturko said in a statement. “While it is not always safe for our officers to take immediate enforcement action at the time of the alleged offences based on the size of the crowd of protesters, these incidents will be fully investigated and could lead to subsequent arrests or charges.”</p> <p>The border closure was shorter than <a href="#">one last weekend</a>, in which the Pacific Highway crossing was closed or blocked for parts of two days, and 16 people were arrested after a convoy of vehicles arrived from the Canadian interior.</p> <p>Washington State Patrol Trooper Kelsey Harding said there was no activity on the U.S. side of the border Saturday. The Pacific Highway crossing connects to Highway 543.</p> <p>Protesters objecting to COVID-19 restrictions have been active in several Canadian cities and border crossings since late January. Supportive protests have followed in several other countries. Truck convoys have disrupted downtown Ottawa, the Canadian capital. <a href="#">On Saturday, police cleared an encampment of truckers and other protesters</a> in front of the Canadian Parliament building.</p> <p>Counterprotesters have also come out. A group in downtown Vancouver, B.C., on Saturday held signs asking people to honk for vaccines, The Vancouver Sun <a href="#">reported</a>. People protesting the mandates also were in downtown Vancouver. Counterprotesters attempted to block the path of convoy vehicles, the Sun reported.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>02/20 Psychiatric boarding: windowless ER rooms</b>
----------	--

SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/mental-health/33-days-without-sunlight-why-hundreds-of-washington-kids-in-mental-health-crisis-are-living-inside-windowless-emergency-departments/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/mental-health/33-days-without-sunlight-why-hundreds-of-washington-kids-in-mental-health-crisis-are-living-inside-windowless-emergency-departments/</a>
GIST	<p>Two dates are written inside a notebook Lisa Tonseth keeps close at hand. Aug. 5, 2021: the day after her 16-year-old son Dylan was first brought to the hospital’s emergency department during a psychiatric crisis. Then, 33 days later, Sept. 7. The day Dylan finally got out.</p> <p>For more than a month inside Sacred Heart Children’s emergency department in Spokane, Dylan’s world was confined to a small windowless room lit only by the unnatural glow of fluorescent light. Going outdoors for fresh air or exercise wasn’t allowed. Lisa brought him art supplies and he watched TV. But he was so lonely that sometimes he’d ask if a hospital security guard would come by to chat.</p> <p>To pacify Dylan, who has autism, ADHD, depression, psychosis and low intellectual ability, staff served him chocolate milk.</p> <p>His treatment was limited to antipsychotics and other medications, his parents say. Boredom eventually turned to aggression. Most days, his parents say, medical staff were forced to tie Dylan to a gurney, or call security for help. He tried to wrestle away a guard’s Taser. And Dylan attempted several times to escape, once making it as far as the parking lot before a guard hauled him back.</p> <p>“He would scream and say he wanted out of there,” said Mike Tonseth, Dylan’s father. “He had less opportunity than a person who is incarcerated.”</p> <p>There’s a technical term for when someone like Dylan finds themselves living inside a hospital emergency department: Psychiatric boarding. Then there’s the word Dylan’s mother uses: warehousing.</p> <p>Hundreds, if not thousands, of kids across Washington have been “boarded” inside emergency departments in recent years, because the hospital has determined they need to be admitted for psychiatric care but no mental health beds are available. No one interviewed for this story supports boarding. Instead, it’s widely viewed as a grim reality. And the problem, which existed before the pandemic, is only getting worse.</p> <p>Children are kept in the emergency department — or a medical unit — because they’re unsafe outside it. They might be suicidal, homicidal or in desperate need of care for hallucinations or psychosis. For Dylan, voices told him to kill himself and his parents, and in 2020, he attempted to burn down the family’s home.</p> <p>But ERs are often ill-equipped to treat children with significant long-term mental health concerns. They’re noisy, chaotic and cold. ER staff are trained to stabilize patients in crisis, but often don’t know how, or don’t have the time or space, to treat complex diagnoses like Dylan’s, leaving children at risk of suicide stranded for days or weeks without proper psychiatric care. Emergency departments are outfitted with all sorts of medical equipment like needles and scissors that could be used to self-harm — not stripped to the essentials, as happens in psychiatric wards.</p> <p>Using restraints or medications are sometimes medical staff’s only options to keep violent outbursts at bay, since ERs don’t always have seclusion rooms for kids to cool down. And they’re sometimes over capacity: Seattle Children’s ER has been so full, several staff said, that they’ve been forced to set up beds for boarders in a hospital office space.</p> <p>“It’s so wildly inappropriate to board patients that are struggling with mental health, in a windowless room, without access to regular exercise or outdoor time. All the things we know could help children with behavioral problems,” said Dr. Breanna Barger-Kamate, an emergency room doctor at Sacred Heart who worked with the Tonseth family.</p> <p>Youth like Dylan are in emergency departments instead of receiving the specialized, therapeutic care they need because the <a href="#">mental health care system</a> is splintered from top to bottom, hospital workers say. Washington has <a href="#">historically ranked among the states</a> with the highest rates of mental illness and worst access to mental health care. A <a href="#">lack of outpatient services</a> means children often don’t get early</p>

interventions when they start having psychiatric symptoms. And there are [only 94 long-term pediatric inpatient beds](#) available to serve the state's 1.1 million children.

On any given day, an average of 33 Washington children are in emergency departments, hotels or acute care units waiting for a long-term bed, according to [records from the State Health Care Authority that urge officials to invest more in inpatient beds](#); wait times range from one to four months and the cost of boarding or waiting elsewhere is estimated to exceed \$20 million annually. "We're a stopgap in a broken system," said Dr. Tony Woodward, medical director of the emergency department at Seattle Children's. The result is a shadowy form of isolation that keeps children in hospitals without treatment. One deemed so abhorrent it was made illegal for adults.

Washington has long [lacked enough inpatient beds](#) to meet the state's need, but in 2014, the [state Supreme Court](#) ruled that [detaining adults](#) in hospital rooms without psychiatric treatment went against citizens' rights. The ruling spurred the state to [almost immediately invest \\$30 million](#) in new adult psychiatric beds. But the ruling seemingly left room for hospitals to continue boarding children.

It's difficult to estimate how many Washington children board each year since hospitals don't uniformly keep records on such patients. But a [November study in the Journal of the American Medical Association](#) (JAMA) suggests that compared to before the pandemic, 84% of hospitals are boarding more youth patients, and 75% are reporting longer boarding stays. Eleven physicians, social workers and nurses across all three of Washington's children's hospitals — Sacred Heart, Seattle Children's and Mary Bridge in Tacoma — told The Seattle Times in interviews that boarding has reached crisis level during the pandemic.

Indeed, [Gov. Jay Inslee](#) declared a [youth mental health crisis](#) in March 2021, citing available data from these hospitals and others that illustrated a dire spike in suicidal behaviors and boarding.

"We first saw this trend emerge in September 2020," Sarah Rafton, who is executive director of the Washington Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics and compiled the data for Inslee's office, [wrote in a March 2021 email](#). "I am sick about it that so much time has elapsed and we are seeing children and adolescents decompensate to the point of needing hospitalizations and ICU care in these increasing numbers."

Kathryn Leathers, general counsel for Inslee's office, responded: "It is heartbreaking and terrifying."

As of August, Barger-Kamate said 300 children had boarded by that point in 2021, and collectively lived 971 days inside Sacred Heart's emergency department. It used to be rare for a child with behavioral concerns to stay two, or even three days in the ER, said Dr. Michael Barsotti, chief administrative officer at Sacred Heart Children's. But in January 2021, one child boarded for 24 days. In February, 22. Same with March. In both April and June, the longest boarders lived in the emergency department for 29 days.

Youth like Dylan, who have developmental disabilities in addition to mental health needs, are among the hardest to place in inpatient care, several health care workers say. Children 12 and younger are hard to place, too; some as young as 7 have spent 10 or more days in Sacred Heart's ER, Barger-Kamate said.

"The most challenging patients," she said, "(who) are going to be most agitated in an ER unit and the least able to cope with boarding, are the ones that end up boarding."

#### **"Why am I still here?"**

While boarding is often thought of as "something that is temporary," a recent study shows it's a "systemic and national problem," said lead researcher Dr. JoAnna Leyenaar, associate professor of pediatrics at Geisel School of Medicine at Dartmouth, in New Hampshire.

In the November study in JAMA, the first of its kind to examine pediatric boarding on a national level, she and her colleagues found that all but one of the 88 children's and community hospitals they surveyed reported that children were boarding and awaiting inpatient psychiatric care during the pandemic.

Children waited an average of 48 hours before they were transferred to an inpatient bed, [more than 10 times the recommended length](#) of stay in an emergency department.

Unfortunately, there's still a major gap in researchers' empirical understanding of how boarding affects children psychologically, Leyenaar said. But there's [a large body of research](#) that points to how stress affects the brain, including negative consequences on memory, cognition and mood. And countless studies suggest social isolation is tied to [suicide](#), [high blood pressure](#) and [premature death](#).

The handful of small studies on boarding youth that do exist suggest these children experience a range of emotions during long stays in the emergency department. In [a 2019 study](#), some youth described feeling safe and grateful to hospital staff, with one participant saying, "The second the [psychiatric technician] walked in, they cracked me up. They really honestly made my day so much better."

But others were scared and overwhelmed. "I know I can't really get up and then just walk around. And I started thinking that I don't want to be here then I just get upset," one participant said.

And another: "What's taking so long to find me a bed? Why am I still here?"

In Washington, finding a bed is reliant on slow and outdated systems of communication, like fax machines.

Following Inslee's youth mental health crisis proclamation, the state's Department of Health [commissioned a report](#) where hospitals described a chaotic, inefficient workflow that involves cold-calling each of the state's inpatient units every time they look for an available bed. Hospitals then fax the child's medical information and wait for a response. If no bed is available, the child boards in the ER.

The September 2021 report points to a software solution called [Open Beds](#), which is built to streamline referrals and share real-time data on bed availability. But, according to the report, the tool is "not currently online in Washington State."

The strain on hospitals and inpatient facilities has been made worse amid the recent closure of residential treatment options at [Ryther in Seattle](#) and [Navos in Burien](#), the report suggests.

So, the kids stay stuck.

The ER's relative safety stretches resources. At Sacred Heart, kids living in the ER are occupying a room that typically would be used to serve about nine kids each day. Some nights, the waiting room at Sacred Heart is so full that families wait hours before they're called in, said Dr. Barger-Kamate.

The hospital is responding by hiring people whose primary job is to entertain and keep watch on children who are boarding, she said.

Staff who work in Washington's children's hospitals described their emergency departments as having a duty — but lacking expertise — to adequately care for kids with psychiatric conditions. Turnover is high, as emergency department staff get burned out. Julie Johnson, social work manager at Mary Bridge, said when a child might benefit from taking an antipsychotic or other medication, staff sometimes consult over the phone or video with telepsychiatrists who live across the country, since there's such a [big shortage of psychiatrists](#) in Washington.

Two emergency department staff at Seattle Children's, who are not being named because they feared retaliation or their jobs were at risk by speaking to the press, said that the kids have no routine, no scheduled activities. On a calm day, a nurse might pop in and play a game of cards. But constant shift changes mean children frequently have to reorient as new faces come to their bedside. The hospital was supposed to build a shower inside the emergency department but hasn't, so boarding children sometimes go a couple of days without the ability to bathe, the employees said.



One of the Seattle Children's employees, who is part of an emergency department team that evaluates children in mental health crises, said oftentimes the hospital boards children out of compassion for families who don't have the resources or ability to care for their kids. But if he knows a child might board for multiple days, and isn't at imminent risk of hurting themselves, he feels compelled to discharge them.

"If they are just going to sit by themselves in the ED with not much interaction for three or four days, that just feels wrong," the employee said. "Just boarding in an ED could make you sicker."

Dr. Ravi Ramasamy, a psychiatrist who works at Seattle Children's inpatient psychiatric unit, said he's noticed that patients who eventually get admitted from the ER to his unit are less patient and want to go home sooner than kids who don't wait days in the ER.

"By the time they get up to the unit they may be less invested in treatment and less hopeful about whether it will help them," he said, "regardless of what state of mind they came in with to start."

### **The Loop**

Dylan's parents wonder sometimes what it would have been like had Dylan received the right treatment when he was young.

Mike and Lisa Tonseth adopted Dylan when he was born in 2005 and raised him and their older daughter in an airy rambler just north of Cashmere, Chelan County. The green roofs of neighboring homes, and a narrow road that snakes through the snowy valley, are just visible from the family home. On a day in late January, the sky was the kind of faded white that doesn't distinguish between morning and afternoon. Wild turkeys roamed.

The couple moved here from Wenatchee before Dylan was born, wanting a reprieve from the city to raise a family. Mule deer and bison skulls taken by Mike, a Department of Fish & Wildlife biologist, adorn the family room and kitchen. But bucolic life, 30 minutes from the nearest hospitals, had unforeseen consequences.

*What was Dylan like as a boy?* The Tonseths recite Dylan's behaviors like they're ticking off boxes for all the classic traits of his eventual diagnoses. As a toddler, he avoided eye contact, had delayed speech and fixated on specific toys — all typical traits of autism. As he grew up, loud noises and rides on the school bus wound him up. He was anxious, impulsive, and eventually, physically aggressive. They suspected he might have autism. But there were no developmental specialists in the area.

*He'll grow out of it,* their pediatrician said.

Around age 10 or 11, a new physician diagnosed Dylan with autism and fetal alcohol spectrum disorder. "Her comments to us were, why was he not diagnosed earlier with these conditions, particularly autism?" Lisa said. "Early intervention for these things is critical."

When he's able to focus, Dylan is polite, generous and makes silly jokes. He likes to sketch and write stories. But he has trouble reading social cues and was bullied in middle school. A doctor prescribed him Ritalin for ADHD. But because of where the Tonseths live, Dylan still didn't have access to the recommended therapy for autism. And though he eventually was put on a waitlist, his parents say they couldn't afford the \$14,000-year out-of-pocket cost.

In 8th grade, his parents noticed a change in Dylan's face, his gait, his mood. In a photo at 12, the boy with dark blond hair squints as he smiles broadly. But by 14, Dylan is hollow-eyed, staring blankly at the camera. Before the pandemic, he'd started hearing voices and seeing things that weren't there. Dylan made threats to kill himself and his sister. His parents brought him to Central Washington Hospital, but several times he was sent home because he was deemed to no longer be in crisis.

They grew tired of the loop: crisis, ER, return home with no new tools or resources.

A couple of weeks after the pandemic shut down schools, Dylan lit a fire in the family's basement. Over the next year and a half, Dylan was in and out of the ER and inpatient care, eventually landing a long-term inpatient bed at a Yakima facility called Two Rivers Landing. There, he started using words more frequently to express his emotions and needs.

But after a 13-month stay, Dylan was discharged in June 2021 against his parents' better judgment. [Email correspondence](#) from the family shows they and state Developmental Disability Administration officials had raced to put together a patchwork of care options as Dylan's discharge date approached, but his parents ultimately felt the options offered didn't provide enough monitoring to keep Dylan safe.

When they didn't pick him up, they discovered the facility had called the police to bring Dylan to an ER in Yakima.

With the help of a government case manager they worked furiously to find Dylan another bed at a group home in Spokane. Dylan had his own room, he'd started to get set up with doctor's and dentist appointments, and he went on outings with the home's staff and other residents. But a month in, his suicidal and homicidal thoughts came back, and he became violent. Police were called, and on Aug. 4, the day before the first date Lisa jotted down in her notebook, emergency services took Dylan to the ER at Sacred Heart.

In a 2020 neuropsychological report, a clinical psychologist had diagnosed Dylan with PTSD, autism, major depressive disorder with psychotic features, and intellectual disability. The psychologist also described Dylan as being aware of his angry, violent behavior. This awareness only fuels more anxiety, trauma and worse outbursts. In the Sacred Heart emergency room, though, physicians kept telling the Tonseths that Dylan didn't meet criteria for admittance into their acute inpatient psychiatric unit. Dylan was experiencing behavioral concerns, they said, that they weren't suited to treat. *So there's no possible way that home would work?* staff asked. Absolutely not, the Tonseths said.

At home, alarms are still attached to the door and window in Dylan's room, safety precautions from when he was prone to running away and having violent fits. Aside from his twin bed, the space is mostly empty. Dylan's belongings are boxed in his closet, waiting for a more permanent home. "Thinking about being a mom, thinking about my little boy suffering, it's definitely hard," said Lisa, who works in special education. "But I know I can't provide the safety that he needs."

### **Steep cost**

This [legislative session](#), Inslee wants to inject \$30 million — including \$15 million in federal dollars — to fund an additional 42 Children's Long-term Inpatient Program beds, known as CLIP, which is the most intensive inpatient service available to children and involves lengthy residential stays. Lawmakers are also floating several policy fixes, including a measure that would improve access to intensive outpatient programs for low-income families. The package of proposals represents a "pretty significant" investment compared to recent years, said Amber Leaders, senior policy adviser on behavioral health, aging and disability in the governor's office.

But several experts interviewed for this story, including Leaders, said Washington has historically underinvested in pediatric mental health care.

The medical system has little financial incentive to build more inpatient psychiatric beds, said Barsotti, the Sacred Heart Children's administrator. Mental health care, he said, is a money-losing proposition. Medicine is reimbursed based on procedures patients undergo, he pointed out, and with mental health "there are no procedures." "There are a lot of hospitals in the state, Seattle Children's, Sacred Heart, Mary Bridge, who do this work because they know it's the right thing to do and they will eat the cost of part of it ... but you can't bleed your entire resources out on one service."

According to a state estimate, one day of boarding costs \$1,670. But at Seattle Children's, the hospital is only able to bill insurance for the equivalent of a single visit to the ER, said Woodward, the head of Seattle

Children’s ER, no matter how long the child stays. “It really costs the hospital a lot,” he said. “But I think more than finance, it’s about the service provided to the other patients.”

Children who are boarding largely exist in a legal gray area, and a fix isn’t straightforward.

The principles of the 2014 Supreme Court ruling on adults should also protect youth who are involuntarily committed, said Jeff Sconyers, former senior vice president and general counsel at Seattle Children’s who now teaches at the University of Washington School of Public Health. But most children in need of inpatient beds aren’t involuntarily committed — parents or caregivers have rights over their care and can seek treatment without involving the courts.

Other state laws [offer protections](#) for inpatient children, but kids who are boarding usually aren’t considered inpatients. “They ought to be getting care and, probably, there’s a legal right to it,” Sconyers said. That question hasn’t been litigated, however.

In September, Dylan’s luck improved after Barger-Kamate took matters into her own hands. “The reason we got him eventually out of the ER is because I essentially begged the hospital to do so,” she said.

Finally, after more than a month, Dylan was headed upstairs to an inpatient bed.

Dylan’s new room has a window. He has a team of psychiatric staff overseeing his medications. And when he gets upset, trained staff calm him down. But his behavior is volatile and they’re often forced to restrain him; Dylan has punched at least one staff member and threatened to hurt others, offenses that come with time spent in a locked, secluded room. He’s receiving limited therapy, and as a side effect of his medications, his eating habits and inability to exercise, is now 253 pounds, up from 130 pounds in 2019.

Dylan’s family says they’re not equipped to bring him home, and state agencies have tried and failed to find a long-term bed for him out of state. Other forces are now pushing to get Dylan out of the hospital: Sacred Heart has hired attorneys, the Tonseths said, who are pressuring the state to find an alternative. One option, a [state-operated supported living program](#) is supposed to become available in April. But it’s not clear where Dylan would go in the meantime.

For now, Dylan’s good days are becoming more common.

On a recent visit, in early December, Dylan showed Mike and Lisa drawings he’d made and introduced them to staff on the unit. They listened to music. He told them he’s homesick.

“I was having such a good time I felt like I wanted to stay a little longer because we don’t get to see him very often,” Lisa said. “There’s that sorrow of, you walk off, and the reality of the situation hits you.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	02/19 How long Covid exhausts the body
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/02/19/science/long-covid-causes.html">https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/02/19/science/long-covid-causes.html</a>
GIST	<p>Millions of people continue to suffer from exhaustion, cognitive problems and other long-lasting symptoms after a coronavirus infection. The exact causes of the illness, known as long COVID, are not known. But new research offers clues, describing the toll the illness takes on the body and why it can be so debilitating.</p> <p><b>Diagnosing Long COVID</b></p> <p>Patients with severe COVID may wind up in hospitals or on ventilators until their symptoms resolve. Damage to the body from severe COVID — pneumonia, low oxygen, inflammation — typically shows up on traditional diagnostic tests.</p> <p>Long COVID is different: A chronic illness with a wide variety of symptoms, many of which are not explainable using conventional lab tests. Difficulties in detecting the illness have led some doctors to</p>

dismiss patients or to misdiagnose their symptoms as psychosomatic. But researchers looking more deeply at long COVID patients have found visible dysfunction throughout the body.

Studies estimate that perhaps 10% to 30% of people infected with the coronavirus may develop long-term symptoms. It's unclear why some people develop long COVID and others don't, but four factors appear to increase the risk: high levels of viral RNA early during an infection; the presence of certain autoantibodies; the reactivation of Epstein-Barr virus; and having Type 2 diabetes.

### **The Immune System**

Long COVID patients appear to have disrupted immune systems compared with post-COVID patients who fully recover. Many researchers believe chronic immune dysfunction after a coronavirus infection may set off a chain of symptoms throughout the body.

One possibility is that the body is still fighting remnants of the coronavirus. Researchers found that the virus spreads widely during an initial infection, and that viral genetic material can remain embedded in tissues — in the intestines, lymph nodes and elsewhere — for many months.

Ongoing studies are trying to determine if these viral reservoirs cause inflammation in surrounding tissues, which could lead to brain fog, gastrointestinal problems and other symptoms.

Researchers have also found evidence that COVID may trigger a lasting and damaging autoimmune response. Studies have found surprisingly high levels of autoantibodies, which mistakenly attack a patient's own tissues, many months after an initial infection.

A third possibility is that the initial viral infection triggers chronic inflammation, possibly by reactivating other viruses in the patient's body that are normally dormant. The reactivation of Epstein-Barr virus, which infects most people when they are young, might help predict whether a person will develop long COVID, one study found.

Inside the intricate world of the immune system, these explanations may coexist. And just as different long COVID patients may have different symptoms, they may also have different immune problems, too. Identifying the problems that are central to each patient's illness will be critical for guiding treatment, said Dr. Akiko Iwasaki, an immunologist at Yale.

For instance, a patient with autoantibodies might benefit from immunosuppressive medication, while a patient with a viral COVID reservoir should receive antivirals, Iwasaki said. "Depending on what each person has, the treatment would be quite different."

### **The Circulatory System**

Many long COVID patients struggle with physical activity long after their initial infection and experience a relapse of symptoms if they exercise. Initial studies suggest that dysfunction in the circulatory system might impair the flow of oxygen to muscles and other tissues, limiting aerobic capacity and causing severe fatigue.

In one study, patients with long-lasting COVID symptoms had unexpected responses to riding a bike. Despite having apparently normal hearts and lungs, their muscles were only able to extract a portion of the normal amount of oxygen from small blood vessels as they pedaled, markedly reducing their exercise capacity.

One possible culprit: Chronic inflammation may damage nerve fibers that help control circulation, a condition called small fiber neuropathy. The damaged fibers, seen in skin biopsies, are associated with dysautonomia, a malfunction of automatic functions — such as heart rate, breathing and digestion — that is very common in long COVID patients.

These findings demonstrate that people with long COVID are suffering systemic physical problems, rather than just being anxious or out of shape, said Dr. David Systrom, an exercise physiologist at Brigham and Women's Hospital who helped conduct the bike study.

"You can't make up small fiber neuropathy by skin biopsy. That isn't in somebody's head," Systrom said. "You can't make up poor oxygen extraction to this degree. All of these are objective measures of disease."

South African researchers found another circulation problem: Microscopic blood clots. Tiny clots that form during an initial COVID infection will typically break down naturally but might persist in long COVID patients. These clots could block the tiny capillaries that carry oxygen to tissues throughout the body.

Inflammatory substances called cytokines, which are often elevated in long COVID patients, may injure the mitochondria that power the body's cells, making them less able to use oxygen. Walls of blood vessels may also become inflamed, limiting the uptake of oxygen.

Whatever the cause, low oxygen levels may contribute to long COVID's most common symptom: severe fatigue. Researchers studying patients with chronic fatigue syndrome (also known as ME/CFS), which shares many features with long COVID, found a similar pattern: A lack of oxygen triggered by circulatory problems puts enormous strain on the body's metabolism, making simple activities feel like strenuous exercise.

### **The Brain**

Even people with mild cases of COVID can experience sustained cognitive impairments, including reduced attention, memory and word-finding. Possible long-term neurological problems from COVID constitute "a major public health crisis," according to Avindra Nath, clinical director of the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke.

Researchers found a wide range of dysfunction in the brains of long COVID patients. Although it is unclear how often COVID directly penetrates the brain, even mild infections appear to cause significant brain inflammation, according to the researchers, who included Nath, Iwasaki and Michelle Monje, a neurologist at Stanford.

Infections may trigger the overactivation of immune cells called microglia in a way that appears similar to the process that can contribute to cognitive problems in aging and some neurodegenerative diseases.

Another research group found that long COVID can significantly reduce the amount of oxygen that reaches the brain, a finding that has also been seen in patients with a similar condition, chronic fatigue syndrome.

### **The Lungs**

Shortness of breath is a frequent symptom of long COVID. But common lung tests — including chest X-rays, CT scans and functional tests — often come back normal.

Using specialized MRI scans, a team of British researchers found preliminary evidence of lung damage in a small group of long COVID patients who had never been hospitalized. Detailed scans of their lung function indicated that most of the patients took up oxygen less efficiently than healthy people did, even if the structure of their lungs appeared to be normal.

The researchers cautioned that a larger group of patients will be needed to confirm the findings. If the results hold up, possible explanations for the observed shortness of breath include microclots in lung tissues or a thickening of the blood-air barrier that regulates the uptake of oxygen in the lungs.

[Return to Top](#)

SOURCE	<a href="https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/homeless/crews-starts-clearing-encampment/281-d3447c43-3ae2-4692-ae98-bc844f65fc03">https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/homeless/crews-starts-clearing-encampment/281-d3447c43-3ae2-4692-ae98-bc844f65fc03</a>
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — City crews arrived Sunday morning to clear tents covering the sidewalk across from Seattle City Hall.</p> <p>Clearing the sidewalks is part of a promise Seattle Mayor Bruce Harrell made <a href="#">during his State of the City speech</a>.</p> <p>"With many workers across our city returning to the office in the next several months, our focus must also ensure sidewalks are accessible to the public and clear of obstacles and obstruction. This is an essential obligation of our government," Harrell said during his address.</p> <p>But people living across from City Hall say they have nowhere to go.</p> <p>"Unfortunately, now I'm going to have to setup in the park or put my tent back up somewhere else, <a href="#">in the Jungle</a> or something, which I really don't want to do," said Prudencio Martinez, who said he lives in the encampment along Fourth Avenue.</p> <p>Martinez said he was hoping to go to a shelter but the crews clearing the camp Sunday weren't offering referrals.</p> <p>"The Parks Department reached out and made some calls but no social workers work on Sunday is what they said. So, now it's raining, I'm ready to move, and there's no shelter referral," Martinez said.</p> <p>The city did not immediately respond to KING 5's request for comment on the city's referral efforts Sunday.</p> <p>On Friday, the Department of Human Services said, "Our outreach and shelter referral work are ever active, and the approach reflects the site context and conditions."</p> <p>Ultimately, protesters appeared to stall the city's efforts to clear the encampment on Sunday. Several people stood around tents with arms linked. City crews left after clearing only a few spaces.</p> <p>This is the third encampment crews have worked to clear in a week. An encampment along Utah Avenue was cleared on Feb. 15 and Seven Hill Park in Capitol Hill on the 17.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>02/20 OR, WA doctors 'cautiously optimistic'</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.king5.com/article/news/health/coronavirus/doctors-cautiously-optimistic-covid-hospitalizations-drop/283-eee39376-f3ae-4d92-8434-3b8f7234cf1f">https://www.king5.com/article/news/health/coronavirus/doctors-cautiously-optimistic-covid-hospitalizations-drop/283-eee39376-f3ae-4d92-8434-3b8f7234cf1f</a>
GIST	<p>OREGON, USA — <a href="#">Hospitalizations from COVID-19</a> in Oregon and Washington are declining, in some cases faster than expected, according to experts.</p> <p>"I'm really encouraged by what I'm seeing," said Dr. Peter Graven, director of the Oregon Health and Science University Office of Advanced Analytics, who produces a <a href="#">weekly COVID forecast</a> for the state. "We saw a dramatic decline in the last week."</p> <p>As of Friday, <a href="#">Oregon Health Authority data</a> showed fewer than 800 patients were in the hospital because of COVID, down from the January peak of 1,130.</p> <p>"This is great because it relieves a lot of pressure on that critical resource," Graven said.</p> <p>State officials want Oregon to reach fewer than 400 COVID-related hospitalizations before relaxing the indoor mask mandate. Previous projections showed that would happen by March 31, which is why officials <a href="#">picked that day</a> as the target to end the mandate.</p>

"It looks like we may get there a couple weeks earlier than that," Graven said.

Washington Gov. Jay Inslee announced this week his state's indoor mask mandate will end sooner, on March 21, as long as COVID numbers continue to trend downward.

"We have a responsibility now over the next few weeks," said Dr. Alan Melnick with Clark County Public Health.

Melnick said maintaining COVID prevention will reduce the risk of another new variant like delta or omicron emerging and triggering a renewed surge in COVID cases.

"Wherever the virus is circulating in the world, it has the opportunity to mutate and form a new variant," Melnick said.

Oregon has not said if it will match Washington's earlier date to make masks optional indoors. For the moment, the official word is still that the state will remove the mandate no later than March 31.

Graven does not make those rules, but he said Oregonians are on the right path toward achieving the goal and making COVID more similar to the seasonal flu. He emphasized ongoing prevention efforts will be essential to keeping masks optional:

- Distancing when sick
- Getting vaccinated/boosted against COVID
- Wearing masks in high-risk settings
- Washing hands

"If we can hang tight a little bit longer with some of those key behavior metrics into March, I think we'll be in good shape," he said. "Hopefully we won't have to worry about COVID at all."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	<b>02/20 Final medal count Winter Olympics</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.king5.com/article/sports/olympics/medal-count-beijing-winter-olympics/507-2ddfe6b6-752f-4487-858c-c147e02780cc">https://www.king5.com/article/sports/olympics/medal-count-beijing-winter-olympics/507-2ddfe6b6-752f-4487-858c-c147e02780cc</a> <a href="https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/feb/20/2022-winter-olympics-are-over-where-did-us-finish/">https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/feb/20/2022-winter-olympics-are-over-where-did-us-finish/</a>
GIST	<p>BEIJING, China — The <a href="#">Beijing Winter Olympics</a> have concluded and it's time to tally up the hardware. Once again, the country that already had the most Winter Games medals all-time came out on top.</p> <p>The <a href="#">United States</a> is number two on the <a href="#">all-time list for the Winter Games</a> and will keep that status. It was another strong showing for the U.S. and the <a href="#">women of Team USA</a> can brag that they were mostly responsible for the medal haul.</p> <p><b>1. Norway</b> <a href="#">Norway</a> won the most total medals with 37. It also had the most gold medals with 16. Nearly three-quarters of Norway's medals came in biathlon, cross-country, ski jumping or nordic combined. Norway also had the most medals in men's events with 25.</p> <p><b>2. Russian Olympic Committee</b> <a href="#">ROC</a> finished second overall with 32. It had the most silver with 12 and tied with Canada for the most bronze with 14. And it had the most mixed team event medals with six, including what has become the controversial <a href="#">team figure skating gold</a> due to the positive doping test for <a href="#">Kamila Valieva</a>.</p> <p>Half of ROC's medals also came from biathlon, cross-country, ski jumping or nordic combined. But it also was strong with six figure skating medals.</p>



Russian athletes were forced to compete as ROC due to the long-running doping scandal involving the country. But unless there are new sanctions in the coming years, Russia will officially be recognized again at the 2024 Olympics in Paris.

### 3. Germany

Germany was third overall with 27 medals. That was mainly on its strength in the sliding sports of bobsled, luge and skeleton where it won 16 medals. Nine of its 12 gold medals were in those sports.

### 4. Canada

[Canada](#) was fourth overall with 26. While 11 medals came from the action sports of snowboard and freestyle skiing, nine more came from short track and long track speedskating.

### 5. United States

The [United States](#) finished with 25 total medals. That's eight gold, ten silver and seven bronze. The action sports proved best for Team USA with 12 medals in [snowboarding](#) and freestyle skiing.

But the U.S. can brag that it showed up on the [women's medal podium](#) more than any other country. The Americans won 13 medals in women's-only events, just ahead of the Netherlands with 12.

The U.S. won eight medals in men's events and four in mixed team.

Sweden, Austria and Japan tied for sixth with 18 total medals. [Netherlands](#) and Italy both had 17 to round out the top 10.

Host country China was 11th with 15 medals.

Of the 91 countries and territories at the Beijing Winter Olympics, 29 won at least one medal.

---

The closing ceremony Sunday morning wrapped up a controversial 2022 Winter Olympics.

Between the coronavirus restrictions in Beijing, boycotts due to China's human rights abuses and outrage regarding the doping scandal with Russia's top figure skater, the world's best athletes still went head to head for the prized gold medals.

Norway led the way in both overall medal count and gold medals, earning 16 golds, eight silvers and 13 bronze medals for 37 total — five more than second-place Russia.

The United States finished fifth in overall medal count (25) and tied for fourth in gold medals (8).

The eight U.S. gold medalists: Lindsey Jacobellis (women's snowboard cross), Nathan Chen (men's figure skating), Chloe Kim (women's snowboarding halfpipe), Ashley Caldwell, Christopher Lillis and Justin Schoenefeld (mixed team aerials skiing), Nick Baumgartner and Lindsey Jacobellis (mixed team snowboard cross), Erin Jackson (women's 500-meter speedskating), Kallie Humphries (women's monobob bobsled) and Alex Hall (men's slopestyle skiing).

Germany finished third in medal count with 27, while Canada was fourth with 26. Host China placed 11th with 15 medals.

Here is the overall medal count from the 2022 Winter Olympics:

1. Norway: 37
2. Russian Olympic Committee: 32
3. Germany: 27
4. Canada: 26
5. United States: 25

	T-6. Sweden: 18 T-6. Austria: 18 T-6. Japan: 18 T-9. Netherlands: 17 T-9. Italy: 17 11. China: 15 T-12: Switzerland: 12 T-12: France: 12 14. South Korea: 9 15. Finland 8 16. Slovenia: 7 17. Australia: 4 T-18. New Zealand: 3 T-18. Hungary: 3 T-20. Great Britain: 2 T-20. Belgium: 2 T-20. Czech Republic: 2 T-20. Slovakia: 2 T-20. Belarus: 2 T-25. Spain: 1 T-25. Ukraine: 1 T-25. Estonia: 1 T-25. Latvia: 1 T-25. Poland: 1
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>02/20 Hundreds still reeling Whatcom Co. floods</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/hundreds-still-homeless-november-floods-whatcom-county/UKTI4HPINVCIRL4E7JOWWDMVCQ/">https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/hundreds-still-homeless-november-floods-whatcom-county/UKTI4HPINVCIRL4E7JOWWDMVCQ/</a>
GIST	<p>It may be three months after <a href="#">the devastating November floods</a> that caused \$100 million of damage in Whatcom County, but Sumas, Everson, Nooksack, and other nearby communities are still reeling.</p> <p>Whatcom County Emergency Manager Kyle Christiansen said that nearly 2,000 homeowners and business owners reported damage — and to this day, hundreds of people remain displaced by the floods.</p> <p>“We’ve seen some areas of town where probably over half the people still haven’t moved back into their homes ... because they don’t have the money to rebuild, or they’re waiting on contractors because there is a shortage of materials and people to do the work,” he said.</p> <p>Many of those people, Christiansen said, did not have flood insurance, so they simply cannot afford to repair their homes right now. He explained that FEMA Individual Assistance is providing, on average, about \$5,000 per family, but that does not go very far when a person’s house is so badly damaged that they can’t live in it.</p> <p>“Some people, it could be over a year before they’re back in their home,” Christiansen said.</p> <p>While some residents have been able to stay with friends and relatives, others have had to live in hotels for the past three months.</p> <p>“We have over 100 people in temporary housing, and because of the lack of housing in Whatcom County, they’re staying in hotels,” Christiansen said.</p> <p>They are not paying out of pocket for those hotels, but it is a bit of a race against the clock. Up until now, the hotel stays have been covered by state emergency funds. However, Christiansen said those funds will run out on April 30 — too soon for the people likely to be displaced for the rest of the year.</p>

“We’re working hard with our partners to try to find more permanent houses for these families as that deadline approaches,” Christiansen said.

People who want to help can donate to the Whatcom County Long-Term Recovery Group. Go to [whatcomstrong.com](http://whatcomstrong.com) to learn more. Christiansen said the funds collected go directly to the displaced families.

“It’s still very real for people up here. People are going through different stages of emotion,” Christiansen said. “It’s been over three months since the floodwaters hit, but people forget that there’s still a lot of hurting people, and the best way to support them is to help them on a case-by-case basis to try to endure and get back to a sense of normal life.”

Skagit County is also suffering from the impact of the floods. [The Skagit Valley Herald reported](#) in December that around 150 homeowners and 20 businesses reported damage, totaling about \$15 million.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	<b>02/20 West Seattle Bridge reopening delayed</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://komonews.com/news/local/west-seattle-bridge-reopening-delayed-as-concrete-strike-continues">https://komonews.com/news/local/west-seattle-bridge-reopening-delayed-as-concrete-strike-continues</a>
GIST	<p>SEATTLE - Concrete workers in western Washington are still on strike which means there will now be a delay on the reopening of the West Seattle Bridge.</p> <p>A resolution needed to happen on Feb. 20, according to Seattle Mayor, Bruce Harrell, in order to avoid delays for the bridge.</p> <p>If the strike doesn't end, Harrell said there could be significant delays.</p> <p>According to Jamie Fleming with the Teamsters Local No. 174, no resolution has been reached.</p> <p>"It's tragic how many people are being hurt," said Fleming.</p> <p>Fleming says the strike has been going on for three months. "This is long for any strike," she said.</p> <p>With this work stoppage involving concrete workers in our region, large and small projects that need concrete are caught in the crossfire.</p> <p>One of those projects is the concrete for the West Seattle Bridge repairs.</p> <p>"We're absolutely in favor of an equitable solution," said Heather Marx with the Seattle Department of Transportation.</p> <p>According to Marx, even with the strike ongoing, other work is being done on the bridge that doesn't require concrete.</p> <p>"There's not going to be a point where we're just dropping tools and stopping," Marx said.</p> <p>But with no agreement coming from workers and their employers, a delay is now inevitable.</p> <p>"It's just been a tough situation," said Stewart Lyman, who lives in West Seattle.</p> <p>Lyman says it's difficult to hear that they will most likely have to wait even longer to drive on the bridge again but being patient, like with most things post-2020, is all they can be.</p> <p>"We're just going to keep our fingers crossed, hope for the best and hope the strike gets settled soon," Lyman said.</p>

	<p>KOMO News asked Marx if opening the lower bridge to more traffic is an option to alleviate the long waits at places like Marginal Way.</p> <p>She said it's not an option because that bridge isn't meant to hold that much traffic.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>02/20 Capitol fencing ahead State Union address</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.foxnews.com/politics/capitol-fence-reinstalled-bidens-state-union">https://www.foxnews.com/politics/capitol-fence-reinstalled-bidens-state-union</a>
GIST	<p>Security officials will reinstall fencing around the Capitol next week ahead of President <a href="#">Biden's</a> State of the Union address, Fox News can confirm.</p> <p>U.S. Capitol Police are bracing for a potential "<a href="#">Freedom Convoy</a>" truck protest to <a href="#">Washington D.C.</a> for the March 1 speech. "Freedom Convoy" truckers have been protesting in <a href="#">Canada</a> for weeks against <a href="#">coronavirus</a> restrictions and vaccine mandates and caused a temporary blockade of the busy Ambassador Bridge border crossing between Windsor and Detroit.</p> <p>Capitol Police say they are "aware" of similar protests coming to Washington D.C. and are making plans to both "facilitate" First Amendment protest activity while working with law enforcement agencies and the D.C. National Guard to prepare for Biden's address.</p> <p>"The United States Capitol Police and the United States Secret Service have been closely working together to plan for the upcoming State of the Union," the U.S. Capitol Police <a href="#">said in a statement</a> Friday.</p> <p>"Law enforcement agencies across the National Capital Region are aware of plans for a series of truck convoys arriving in Washington, DC around the time of the State of the Union," police said. "As with any demonstration, the USCP will facilitate lawful First Amendment activity."</p> <p>The Capitol grounds were subjected to major fencing, policing, and military presence following the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>02/20 Next affordable city already too expensive</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.sfgate.com/business/article/The-Next-Affordable-City-Is-Already-Too-Expensive-16931227.php">https://www.sfgate.com/business/article/The-Next-Affordable-City-Is-Already-Too-Expensive-16931227.php</a>
GIST	<p>SPOKANE, Wash. — Maybe it was the date night when he and his wife spent two hours driving 19 miles to dinner, or the homeless encampment down the street, or the fact that homes were so expensive that his children could never afford to live near him.</p> <p>Whatever the reasons, and there were many, Steve MacDonald decided he was done with Los Angeles. He wanted a city that was smaller and cheaper, big enough that he could find a decent restaurant but not so much that its problems felt unsolvable and every little task like an odyssey. After the pandemic hit and he and his wife went through a grand reprioritizing, they centered on Spokane, where their son went to college. They had always liked visiting and decided it would be a nice place to move.</p> <p>Eastern Washington was of course much colder. Until this winter, MacDonald, a native Southern Californian, had never shoveled snow. But their new house is twice as big as their Los Angeles home, cost less than half as much and is a five-minute commute from City Hall, where MacDonald works as Spokane's director of community and economic development.</p> <p>He arrives each day to tackle a familiar conundrum: how to prevent Spokane from developing the same kinds of problems that people like him are moving there to escape.</p> <p>"I'm realizing more and more how important the future prosperity of this city is about getting housing right," he said. "If we don't, it's going to track more closely with what happened in Los Angeles."</p>

MacDonald knows the pattern, and so does everyone else who has been following the U.S. housing market. The story plays out locally but is national in scope. It is the story of people leaving high-cost cities because they've been priced out or become fed up with how impossible the housing problem seems. Then it becomes the story of a city trying to tame prices by building more housing, followed by the story of neighbors fighting to prevent it, followed by the story of less expensive cities being deluged with buyers from more expensive cities, followed by the less expensive cities descending into the same problems and struggling with the same solutions.

It's easier to change where we live than it is to change how we live.

Whether it's Boise, Idaho, or Reno, Nevada, or Portland, Oregon, or Austin, Texas, the American housing market is caught in a vicious cycle of broken expectations that operates like a food chain: The sharks flee New York and Los Angeles and gobble up the housing in Austin and Portland, whose priced-out homebuyers swim to the cheaper feeding grounds of places like Spokane. The cycle brings bitterness and "Don't Move Here" bumper stickers — and in Spokane it has been supercharged during the pandemic and companies' shift to remote work.

No matter how many times it happens, no matter how many cities and states try to blunt it with recommendations to build more housing and provide subsidies for those who can't afford the new stuff, no matter how many zoning battles are fought or homeless camps lamented, no next city, as of yet, seems better prepared than the last one was.

Just a few years ago, a Spokane household that made the median income could afford about two-thirds of the homes on the market, according to Zillow. Now home prices are up 60% over the past two years, pricing out broad swaths of the populace and fomenting an escalating housing crisis marked by resentment, zoning fights and tents.

Being an "it" place was something Spokane's leaders had long hoped for. The city and its metropolitan region have spent decades trying to convince out-of-town professionals and businesses that it would be a great place to move. Now their wish has been granted, and the city is grappling with the consequences.

Growth is never perfect, and Spokane's influx has been accompanied by a booming employment market that has increased wages, turned abandoned warehouses into offices and helped the city recover jobs lost during the pandemic. This is normally called progress. But for people who already lived in and around Spokane or the suburbs just across the border in north Idaho, the shift from living in a place that was broadly affordable to broadly not has come on with the suddenness of a car crash. Now many workers are wondering what the point of growth is if it only makes it harder to keep a roof over their head.

Even the mayor isn't immune. In an interview, Nadine Woodward, a Republican who was elected in 2019, noted that her son and daughter-in-law, newlyweds who moved home during the pandemic, were living with her and her husband while they figured out where they could afford to settle. They came back to Spokane from Seattle, where they were long ago priced out. Austin was the next city on their list, but then its home prices shot up to about where Seattle's were when they left. At this point, even Spokane is seeming pricey.

"I never thought I'd see the day where my adult children couldn't afford a home in Spokane," Woodward said.

### **A Between Place**

Standing by a snow-covered lawn on an overcast afternoon, Steve Silbar, a local real estate agent who has been selling homes for five years, explained Spokane's transformation in terms of a 6-inch screen. When he thinks of a typical buyer, Silbar said, he imagines a couple thousands of miles away, perhaps on a beach, looking at their phones. They're considering moving to a cheaper city, and do a search for homes.

Clients like this are why Silbar invested \$3,000 in a camera that allows him to create three-dimensional tours of his listings, and why the exterior of every home he sells is showcased with an aerial video shot by

a drone. In a market that attracts so many outsiders, a virtual walk through the interior and bird's-eye flight over the street can be the nudge buyers need to bid on a home they've never entered, in a city they've never seen.

"I have to assume that the person that is looking at my listing has never been to Spokane, does not know about Spokane, has no clue," Silbar said.

Spokane is the largest city on the road from Seattle to Minneapolis. This fact is frequently cited as the logic behind its economy: It's between things. The city was incorporated in 1881 and grew into a transportation hub for the surrounding mining and logging industries. It remains a hub, only instead of shipping out timber and silver, businesses revolve around Fairchild Air Force Base and a collection of hospitals and universities that draw from the rural towns that stretch from eastern Washington to northern Idaho and into western Montana.

The transition from past to present plays out across a skyline in which the usual collection of anonymous bank and hotel towers is broken up by historic brick buildings that seem to be either in a state of abandonment or rehabilitation or occupied by low-rent tenants while waiting for redevelopment. The current boom has already made its mark in the form of new apartment towers, warehouses-turned-office buildings and an empty lot that will soon contain a 22-story building that will be the city's tallest.

Driving around town, Michael Sharapata, a commercial real estate broker who moved to Spokane from the Bay Area in 2017, gave a staccato accounting of new leases, such as the millions of square feet that Amazon occupies out by the airport, or the satellite offices rented by various regional accounting and building firms.

His family is coming, too. After Sharapata and his wife moved north, they were followed, in rapid succession, by his brother-in-law in Austin, another brother-in-law in the Bay Area and his sister-in-law in Salt Lake City.

"We were looking for an affordable community that had an opportunity to accommodate all of us," he said.

As in most of urban America, much of the growth in the Spokane area is on the fringes, where heavy equipment and the skeletal outlines of new subdivisions unfold in every direction and into Idaho. Building permits have surged, and the cadre of mostly local builders who had the market more or less to themselves now grumble that the rapid growth has attracted big national builders like D.R. Horton and Toll Brothers.

All of this happened fairly recently. In the years after the Great Recession, when homebuilders were in bankruptcy or hibernation, migration to the Spokane area plunged. That pattern shifted in 2014 when, as if a switch had been flipped, waves of migrants started arriving as already high-cost cities like Seattle and San Francisco saw their housing markets go into a tech-fueled frenzy.

By the end of 2014, migration to the Spokane area had jumped to more than 2,000 net new residents, compared with a net loss the year before, according to Equifax and Moody's Analytics. Annual growth has only continued, rising further with the pandemic to more than 4,500 net new residents.

Sometimes they come for the chance to buy their first home. Other times it's a bigger house or some land. Joel Sweeney, an academic adviser at Eastern Washington University, wanted the best of both: a single-family house on a quiet street that was close enough to downtown that he could walk to a good brewery. That sort of Goldilocks urbanity could cost \$1 million in Austin, where he and his wife lived until last year. When they moved to Spokane they paid less than a third of that.

"You could not get a house for \$299,000 in Austin where you could walk to a bunch of different stuff," he said.

**Nurses and Teachers**

The white house with the red door sits on a quiet block near Gonzaga University. It has two bedrooms, one bathroom and 1,500 square feet of living space.

Silbar, the real estate agent, has sold it twice in the past three years. The first time, in November 2019, he represented a buyer who offered \$168,000 and got it with zero drama. This year it went back on the market, and Silbar listed it for \$250,000. Fourteen offers and a bidding war later, it closed at \$300,000.

When Silbar got into the business, he said, his clients were “nurses and teachers,” and now they’re corporate managers, engineers and other professionals. “What you can afford in Spokane has completely changed,” he said.

The typical home in the Spokane area is worth \$411,000, according to Zillow. That’s still vastly less expensive than markets like the San Francisco Bay Area (\$1.4 million), Los Angeles (\$878,000), Seattle (\$734,000) and Portland (\$550,000). But it’s dizzying (and enraging) to long-term residents.

Five years ago, a little over half the homes in the Spokane area sold for less than \$200,000, and about 70% of its employed population could afford to buy a home, according to a recent report commissioned by the Spokane Association of Realtors. Now fewer than 5% of homes — a few dozen a month — sell for less than \$200,000, and less than 15% of the area’s employed population can afford a home. A recent survey by Redfin, the real estate brokerage, showed that homebuyers moving to Spokane in 2021 had a budget 23% higher than what locals had.

One of Silbar’s clients, Lindsey Simler, a 38-year-old nurse who grew up in Spokane, wants to buy a home in the \$300,000 range but keeps losing out because she doesn’t have enough cash to compete. Spokane isn’t so competitive that it’s awash in all-cash offers, as some higher-priced markets are. But prices have shot up so fast that many homes are appraising for less than their sale price, forcing buyers to put up higher down payments to cover the difference.

A dozen failed offers later, Simler has decided to sit out the market for a while because the constant losing is so demoralizing. If prices don’t calm down, she said, she’s thinking about becoming a travel nurse. With the health care workforce so depleted by COVID-19, travel nursing pays much better and, hopefully, will allow her to save more for a down payment.

“I’m not at the point where I want to give up on living in Spokane, because I have family here and it feels like home,” she said. “But travel nursing is going to be my next step if I haven’t been able to land a house.”

### **‘Positive Activity’**

From her seventh-floor office atop the art deco City Hall, Woodward, the mayor, looked out at the Spokane River, where in the warmer months a gondola glides past her window to the Riverfront Park built for the World’s Fair. Spokane hosted the fair in 1974 as a means of revitalizing its blighted downtown, and during the recent interview Woodward pointed out the window at cranes and construction sites that she calls “positive activity.”

Spokane’s job market is among the strongest in the nation, and the virtuous economic cycle — of people coming for housing, causing businesses to come for people, causing more people to come for jobs — is in full swing. And yet, as in Seattle and California before and increasingly across the nation, the scourge of rising prices, particularly for rent and housing, makes it feel less virtuous than advertised.

The recent Realtors report warned of “significant social implications” if the city doesn’t tackle housing. The issues included young families not being able to buy or taking on excessive debt, small businesses not being able to hire, and difficulty keeping young college graduates in town.

In the dominoes of the housing market, the disappointments of aspiring buyers like Simler get magnified as they move down to lower-income households. With homes so hard to buy, rents have shot up, and the vacancy rate for apartments is close to zero.



All of this has compounded at the lowest end of the market, where the nonprofit Volunteers of America's Eastern Washington and Northern Idaho affiliate, which runs three shelters and maintains 240 apartments for people who were formerly homeless, said it will lose a quarter of its units in the next fiscal year as more of its funding goes to higher rents.

In December, as temperatures dropped and shelters filled, advocates and members of the homeless population protested by setting up several dozen tents on the City Hall steps. The encampment was gone two weeks later but has since been reconstructed on a patch of grass on the other side of town. In the winter cold it smells like ash and soot from the open fires burning to keep people warm.

Last year, Woodward declared a housing emergency, and her administration has put in place initiatives that mirror those of housing-troubled cities on the West Coast. The city has built new shelters, is encouraging developers to repurpose commercial buildings into apartments, is making it easier for residents to build backyard units, and is rezoning the city to allow duplexes and other multiunit buildings in single-family neighborhoods.

Woodward pointed to Kendall Yards, one of the developments outside her City Hall window, as an example of what she wanted to see more of. The mixed-density project could be a postcard picture of what economists and planners say is needed to combat the nation's housing shortage and sprawl.

In defiance of the single-family zoning laws that dictate the look of most U.S. neighborhoods, Kendall Yards has houses next to town homes next to apartments, with retail and office mixed in.

People in town seem to love it, but are leery of there being more places like it, especially in their neighborhood.

"I think it's awesome — I have friends there, and we go down there to the farmers market and walk around," said John Schram, a co-chair of the neighborhood council in Spokane's Comstock neighborhood. "That's just not my vision of what I want for me. My concern is that I move into a neighborhood because of the way that it was designed when I got there, and when somebody else comes in and wants to change that I'm going to be concerned."

He added: "I have nothing against duplexes and triplexes, just not next to my house."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	<b>02/20 Group took down Keystone; now missteps</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.politico.com/news/2022/02/20/350org-mckibben-boeve-keystone-00009866">https://www.politico.com/news/2022/02/20/350org-mckibben-boeve-keystone-00009866</a>
GIST	<p>The group that revived a slumbering environmental movement by focusing on big targets was flying high. It was no longer just a plucky collection of friends from a Vermont college and their luminary founder, Bill McKibben. It was a global force. The \$800,000 retreat at a five-star luxury resort in Killarney, Ireland in March 2019 proved it.</p> <p>The rise for 350.org had been meteoric. The crash would be, too.</p> <p>In the early 2010s, 350.org was the environmental movement's driving force. Led by McKibben, a famed environmentalist and best-selling author, its spectacle-worthy, guerrilla-style protests over causes, including blocking the Keystone XL pipeline, captured the public's imagination. It brought younger, more diverse activists into the green tent. Starting out with eight founding members in 2008, it had grown to 165 full-time employees — not including its many contractors — when staff traveled to Ireland that March.</p> <p>It was at the Killarney retreat that May Boeve, the executive director and one of 350.org's founders, announced that she'd hiked the organization's annual budget to \$25 million. She told staff to dream big. She revealed plans for nearly 130 new hires to make a splash at global climate strikes that September — part of an envisioned revamp to improve the organization's diversity and equity. Everyone there was elated.</p>

But 350.org had never eclipsed \$20 million in revenue in a single year. When it quickly became clear it wouldn't that year, Boeve said she initially kept the information largely to herself, according to an October 2019 internal email to the staff.

"[W]e decided to go very big this year in anticipation that there would, in fact, be a movement surge. We were right about that. My big mistake was not giving us enough time to bring in the resources prior to expanding our spending," Boeve wrote in the all-staff memo. "Money certainly has come in, but not at the scale we needed it to. ... My other regret is not to have sounded the alarm sooner."

The fallout would lead to mass layoffs, departures, exhaustion, distrust and a protracted labor battle that exists to this day, according to internal documents, third-party audits and communications obtained by POLITICO — which made an attempt to contact all parties referenced in this story — in addition to interviews with 18 current and former staff members, most of whom were granted anonymity to speak candidly. The organization saw its U.S. program office fall from nearly 50 people in 2019 to nine entering this year.

The hiring spree intended to make 350.org look more the part of the global organization it wanted to become by adding staff from more diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. Its struggles mirror those of many leading environmental organizations, including the National Audubon Society and the Sierra Club, which are wrestling with internal dissension at a crucial juncture in the fight against climate change — problems shadowed by the movement's historical lack of diversity and its urgent need to bring activists of different backgrounds into the fold.

"This exclusion has resulted in failed attempts to pass durable climate policy because policymakers have ignored the very people who have an organized community behind them," Keya Chatterjee, executive director of the U.S. Climate Action Network, told the House Natural Resources Committee during a Feb. 8 hearing on movement diversity and justice. "My own experience working at a large, white-led NGO was that while there was a focus on diversity in the workforce, there was a lack of retention because of a lack of commitment to justice."

In detailed responses to POLITICO, 350.org's leaders acknowledged their financial missteps and said that, like many organizations, it must do more to create a more inclusive workplace. It described new financial processes and governance measures, efforts to eliminate pay disparities and initiatives to improve equity in hiring.

"Of course it's impacted staff," Boeve said in an interview, referring to the layoffs and financial crisis. "Change processes are very hard. The team leading our U.S. staff have really intentionally focused on rebuilding culture through a justice and equity lens. So that's been a big focus."

As a result of the restructuring, 350.org said, its finances have stabilized. Revenues for fiscal year 2020 hit \$25 million against \$19 million in expenses, while preliminary 2021 estimates show \$23 million of revenue versus \$20 million in expenses, according to 350.org. Across those fiscal years it received \$2.6 million from the Paycheck Protection Program, part of the coronavirus economic relief package that then-President Donald Trump signed into law.

Meanwhile, she said, the group's strategic focus has shifted from focusing on mass demonstrations to more targeted campaigns, such as getting the Federal Reserve to take climate risks more seriously or prodding China to stop financing overseas coal projects.

"350's original purpose as an organization was very much about building this strong, people-powered movement to fight climate change," Boeve said. "I feel like the ways we've transformed the organization has made it fundamentally different from where we started, but remaining really true to our core DNA — and in fact, in some ways, making us even better suited to fulfill that original purpose."

Boeve also touted the group's transition into a global organization that gives decision-making power to regional voices around the world. Yet that shift also accounted for some of the tensions that followed the layoffs, which disproportionately affected the U.S. team.

Twelve current and former staffers contend that 350.org's leaders never addressed — and in some cases actively resisted — concerns about how layoffs were handled and the disproportionate burdens they placed on employees, especially those in the U.S. That led to burnout and low morale.

In a matter of months, many current and former employees say, the group became a shell of its former self. One current staffer said the internal tensions have weakened 350.org's ability to marshal mass protests and events, its historical niche in the environmental movement.

"It's like the world's longest Irish wake," said a former staff member, describing a sense of denial within the organization's leadership. "It's really been dead a long time but everybody's standing around the coffin saying, 'Doesn't it look so pretty? They did such a great job with it. It looks so natural.'"

\*\*\*

Boldness is in 350.org's DNA. The seven Middlebury College students and McKibben, who started the group in 2008, grabbed global interest with audacious demonstrations drawing attention to an overheating planet. Its tactics belied the group's wonky but direct name: Exceeding 350 parts per million of carbon dioxide molecules in the atmosphere would send the Earth's climate off-kilter for good.

Their seminal act was coordinating 5,200 protests across 181 countries ahead of the 2009 United Nations climate talks in Copenhagen. The September 2014 march the group organized brought 400,000 people to New York City streets, according to organizers, ahead of the U.N. General Assembly.

350.org emerged at a time when the environmental movement needed a new adversary. Green groups were reeling from Congress' failure to pass sweeping cap-and-trade legislation in 2010. They focused on a little-known pipeline that sought to bring carbon-heavy oil from Canada to Texas. Keystone XL became a flashpoint for environmental and energy politics. Much of that is owed to 350.org.

But for all its success, the group struggled to overcome its founding by a group of white people. As 350.org matured into adolescence, its founders sought to hire people of color. They mobilized in communities such as Native American reservations, which mounted impassioned resistance to pipelines planned along lands and waters sacred to their histories and cultures. They expanded into the global South, establishing offices in Latin America and Africa.

McKibben, 350.org's figurehead and founder, helped popularize the group. As one of the early prominent writers warning about the dangers of global warming, he had an international audience. Yet McKibben was readying to pass the torch to a younger generation of activists by the time police were arresting him in 2011 and 2013 at the fence in front of then-President Barack Obama's White House in protest of the Keystone XL pipeline. He ceased intimate involvement with 350.org around 2014 before formally stepping away in 2020, according to McKibben's own accounting in an emailed response and three former staff members. McKibben said 350.org "has left its mark" on the environmental movement's efforts to halt climate change.

Even with McKibben's role minimized, the organization's power center still ran through white officials at the top who set 350.org's tone, even as the lower ranks were filled with people of color, according to 10 current and former staff members.

The complex dynamic over race, diversity and equity that enveloped 350.org — and the quest to empower people of color to make consequential strategic decisions — reflected broader challenges in the environmental movement. White, wealthy liberals have dominated green groups for decades, coloring environmentalism with a reputation for elitism.

Five current and former staffers said 350.org was one of the few groups to attempt to rectify those long-standing tensions. It hired a justice and equity manager to the U.S. leadership team and created an internal equity team in 2018. That came as 350.org executed a three-year strategy that included hiring more managers and people of color.

Other process changes included implementing an equity hiring toolkit and a formal effort to tie programming back to issues confronting Black, Latino, Asian and Native American communities. It created a “Frontline Fund” to invest resources and programs in Black, Indigenous and other communities of color facing the starkest climate and pollution effects. In hiring, it implemented a requirement that half of all candidates for jobs be people of color before anyone can be made an offer.

The need to quickly transform the staff was a crucial backdrop to Boeve’s decision to raise the organization’s budget in March 2019, as some staffers say she felt pressure to increase the number of positions in order to hire a more diverse group of organizers.

But when 350.org ended up in a financial crisis that year — forcing a major downsizing and restructuring — those concerns about diversity once again bubbled to the surface. Some staffers contended that programs managed by people of color were starved of funding, setting them up for failure.

It was also hard to tell just how diverse the staff was. 350.org’s reporting on its racial and ethnic makeup has been opaque. The organization said it did not have systems in place for people to identify their race or other demographic information as recently as 2019, and is only just now getting a handle on that information. The organization did not report any racial demographic data on 83 percent of its senior staff and 80 percent of its full-time staff in 2021, according to Green 2.0, a nonprofit that tracks environmental group diversity and equity.

“I don’t think it’s a secret that 350.org could be doing a lot better when it comes to diversity,” said Andres Jimenez, who runs Green 2.0. “It’s not enough to have a seat at the table. You have to have a voice.”

While the 2019 hiring spree had brought more workers of color to 350.org, some felt the resulting layoffs disproportionately affected those workers, too. A group of staff members wrote to 350.org’s global leadership team that implementation of November 2019 layoffs “have perpetuated many of the aspects of white supremacy culture that we are working so hard to combat.”

A June 2020 report by a consultant hired by the organization after the layoffs illuminated those feelings.

“Confidence and trust in the leadership of the organisation - both senior staff and board - was damaged. This has particularly been the case for May” Boeve, said the 2020 report by consultant Hannah Lownsbrough, obtained by POLITICO from 350.org staff. “Layoffs in the US have been experienced as disproportionately affecting people of color and with other marginalised identities on the 350 staff team; concerns have been expressed about the emergence of a ‘white supremacy dominance culture.’”

350.org leaders say 25 people lost their jobs in the layoffs, and 20 of them were white.

But several staff members, including staffers of color, said the actual layoffs told only part of the story. The cutbacks put new stresses on the remaining workers, leading to more departures, including among some people of color who had joined the staff only recently.

350.org acknowledged that the layoffs had “serious impacts on staff morale, and our retention.” 350.org said 35 more staff members left their jobs between Oct. 1, 2019 and Sept. 30, 2020, but did not offer a racial breakdown of those resignations.

In the wake of those layoffs, 350.org said, it increased efforts to alleviate pay and equity disparities, including by minimizing gaps between the lowest and highest paid positions. It said justice, equity, diversity and inclusion are at the core of a new multiyear plan and that it is “working within a broad,

consultative process to ensure multiple perspectives are brought into the building of our programme strategy.”

Those changes included bringing more voices of color into the organization’s global executive leadership team. Six of its nine U.S. program staff members are people of color, the group said. Four members of the organization’s six-person global executive team are women, while half of that team is either a person of color or from the Global South.

But those changes still don’t seem to be felt by U.S. staffers of color. North America Director Tamara Toles O’Laughlin, who is Black, noted in her December 2020 departing statement that she was leaving behind a “women-led, majority Black and brown leadership team.”

But she says that team no longer exists.

“I hired just about every one of the Black and brown people on that staff and I do not believe any except for one are still there,” said Toles O’Laughlin, who now runs the Environmental Grantmakers Association. “They don’t have any new problems. I wish they were as woke as the movement needs it to be.”

Assata Harris, a senior organizing specialist with 350.org, described a “Black staff exodus” in an internal January 2021 Slack message obtained from a third party by POLITICO, claiming that “People are not being paid equitably” and are “overworked and underpaid.”

The organization’s reputation, once revered in environmental circles, has taken a hit. Rumblings about internal racial strife grew loud enough last year for the racial justice organization Action Center on Race and the Economy to walk away from a \$100,000 grant 350.org offered to partner on a campaign, said Erika Thi Patterson, climate and environmental justice campaign director for ACRE.

“My question is simple, why do we continue to work with white-led organizations that treat Black people and Black women in particular like shit?” Anthony Rogers-Wright, environmental justice director with New York Lawyers for the Public Interest, said in a September 2021 email blast to officials from several environmental organizations and Capitol Hill offices such as Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) and Rep. Cori Bush (D-Mo.). He added in the email that 350.org “needs to be put on notice.”

\*\*\*

If one had to pick a beginning to the saga, fiscal year 2018 is a contender: That’s when 350.org brought its financial management in-house.

A 2020 third-party audit by consulting firm FMA, given to POLITICO by 350.org staff, noted that as of 2019, the group’s finance team was “very removed from the rest of the organization.” The audit added that “systems were often not up to date” and staff were not “trained or equipped to work in a complex Global organization,” with 350.org often relying on temporary hires.

“This combined with an aggressive fundraising goal that was not supported with a lot of data and light touch governance left the organization in a perilous position,” the report said.

The FMA auditors blamed a “cheerleader” board, a concentration of power at the executive director level, lack of strategic budgeting and fundraising that was “very story based and not data driven” for the \$25 million budget that was rolled out at the March 2019 global retreat in Ireland — far above the \$19 million it had raised the prior year.

Trouble emerged just two months later.

In June 2019, the board cut its stretch income target in half, from \$12.5 million to \$6 million, as donations foundered. Department heads were warned on July 22 that slow fundraising stressed 350.org’s cash position, according to a timeline compiled in the FMA report. They slashed spending by 15 percent. In

August, Boeve announced a hiring freeze affecting 46 positions, acknowledging “we began our hiring push even before all the funds had been secured.”

The September 2019 climate strikes on which Boeve pinned her fundraising hopes were just a few weeks away, but it was clear that 350.org was hemorrhaging money.

The leadership team called for emergency meetings in early September, but was advised “to not communicate to all staff before implications were fully clear and not to disrupt prior to climate strikes,” according to the FMA report.

As activists and staffers hit the streets the week of September 20, the leadership team met in New York City between September 22 and 24 to “finalize emergency measures” — including the plan for budget cuts and significant layoffs. Boeve announced the layoffs in October.

“Our reading of the landscape proved to be inaccurate, and unfortunately our systems were not fully in place yet for us to have been able to course correct in time,” Boeve said in an email to staff after the climate strikes.

The initial reductions were slated to affect 30 to 35 positions, bringing the overall staff down to about 160. U.S. program staff stood at 50 when layoffs began but fell to 41 afterward, according to headcounts compiled by as many as 10 current and former staff members, said a person involved in the effort.

But then more quit of their own volition. Those who remained juggled departed colleagues’ workloads. For many, it led to crushing hours and stress without extra pay.

“US staff face tremendously low morale and unrealistic workloads,” the Progressive Workers Union, which represents 350.org staffers, said in an October 2020 email that was obtained by POLITICO.

Those challenges polluted the work environment, current and former staffers, leading to additional departures. In 2022, only nine U.S. program staff members remain. Globally, the organization employs 142 people, well below the 160 at which Boeve hoped to stabilize the organization.

\*\*\*

Such complaints are at the center of a labor battle raging within 350.org.

PWU successfully halted an August 2020 restructuring attempt even as 40 percent of the U.S. workforce quit that year. PWU accused 350.org’s management in an October 2020 email of various practices, including demoting a bargaining team member, offering only nonunion members a choice over which roles they wanted in the new structure and combining most union roles “so workloads are increased.”

350.org rejected those characterizations in a response to POLITICO, saying that “all impacted staff were consulted” and that, with respect to retaliation allegations, “we would welcome an opportunity to address those accusations in the appropriate administrative or legal forum.”

In an email to 350.org’s human resources department that was obtained by POLITICO from staff, Matt Leonard, who had been with 350.org for a decade and is now director at climate group Oil and Gas Action Network, alleged his efforts to hold management accountable for its decision-making led to his demotion.

“[T]he organization has now let a toxic culture of bullying, favoritism, intimidation, and retaliation continue despite numerous staff raising concerns, making formal HR complaints, and massive staff losses in the past year,” Leonard wrote in the email. “350.org has created working conditions so intolerable that it reasonably expects will lead to staff resignations.”

Leonard left the organization last year.

More staff members left that fall, fearing layoffs. The organization largely did not fill those. Some current and former staff members said the cutbacks led to a perception that people of color were more likely to perform multiple jobs without commensurate pay. They said that 350.org did not compensate employees with additional pay for taking on responsibilities from staffers who departed on the same salary grade. Thus, the changes allegedly left junior staffers — who were more likely to be people of color — doing more work.

350.org said that “staff who took on further responsibilities did receive temporary pay increases commensurate to level of responsibility (compared to the salary grades in the organization),” but only if those duties were “additional to their job description.”

The finance team was particularly hard hit, delaying the processing of even routine expense reports. A separate former staffer said they spent \$3,000 of their own money to reimburse recent college graduates that 350.org had hired in several 2020 election battleground states for their out-of-pocket expenses.

350.org eventually began working on its latest round of restructuring in February 2021, first sharing a draft proposal with staff that June. Lindsay Meiman, who worked in 350.org’s communications department for seven years before leaving in 2021, described the stakes in a June 2021 plea to Board of Directors Chair K.C. Golden: “To be clear: this is an organizational crisis moment,” she said in an email obtained by POLITICO from staff members.

350.org management defended the restructuring timeline, saying it paused the previous iteration in 2020 to enable more union participation, according to emails obtained by POLITICO. Delaying it any further would prevent 350.org from filling vacant positions, further draining staff by keeping the organization under capacity, Tes de Leon-Connors, who led the human resources department at the time, said in a June 2021 email.

Yet a December 2021 email from several staffers to executive leadership complained that the restructuring had already caused attrition. They said several employees left after learning that they would drop multiple levels of seniority and pay, shift onto new teams, or move out of managerial roles entirely.

350.org objected to that description, though it said the restructuring eliminated three senior staff positions while creating 13 new or vacant positions. It said the new structure was designed “to address and correct historic salary and pay inequities that had been created over time that favored ‘veteran,’ typically non-BIPOC, staff members.”

The union helped negotiate voluntary severance packages last fall. 350.org said five staff members, as well as two managers, took the severance.

Boeve, however, sees a light at the end of the tunnel — and a more diverse and equitable organization in the future.

“Not just our organization — in big green groups, but also in Fortune 500 companies and government agencies — are really trying to grapple with this moment of racial reckoning that is long overdue,” she said. “I hope that that grappling makes us all better. Because of our staff of color pushing inside 350 and a lot of our partners outside 350, I really think that we’ve made some significant changes that I am proud of.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	02/19 Sticker shock: 80% car buyers above MSRP
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.cnn.com/2022/02/19/business/car-buyers-sticker-shock/index.html">https://www.cnn.com/2022/02/19/business/car-buyers-sticker-shock/index.html</a>
GIST	Only a year ago almost no one paid the full sticker price when buying a new car. Now you’re lucky if you can.



In perhaps the most striking sign of the change in new car pricing, 80% of new car buyers in January paid more than manufacturer's suggested retail price, or MSRP, according to data from Edmunds, the online site that tracks car rankings and prices. That's what's commonly known as [sticker price](#).

It's the latest manifestation of the fact that a shortage of parts, especially [computer chips](#), has caused automakers to [temporarily halt production](#) at various plants. That has left dealers with fewer vehicles than they need to meet customer demand.

That has resulted the average transaction price hitting \$45,717 in January, or \$728 above MSRP.

It's up nearly \$6,000, or 15%, from January a year ago, and about \$7,500 higher than the average price paid in January 2020, just before the pandemic started roiling the auto industry.

Only 2% of buyers paid above MSRP a year ago, with buyers paying on average about \$2,150 less than sticker at that time.

"Demand is through the roof, and supplies are historically tight," said Ivan Drury, senior manager of insights for Edmunds. He said if a buyer isn't willing to pay above the sticker price, the dealer can be confident there will soon be another buyer who will.

"We're talking only a 10- to 11-day average for the time vehicles are on the lot," he said. "We've never seen that."

Part of the increase in pricing is because consumers are increasingly buying more SUVs and pickups and fewer sedans, which are typically less expensive. They're also choosing more expensive options, such as automatic braking and lane departure warnings that are designed to make the cars safer.

But the biggest factor behind the price increases is the shortage of cars.

The only good news for car buyers is that [used car prices](#) are going up even faster than new car prices, due to an even tighter supply of vehicles in that market. The average value of a trade-in has increased \$8,000 in the last year, according to Edmunds.

### **Dealers are the big winners**

The [biggest winners](#) from the current prices: auto dealers, and not the automakers. Until Tesla came along with its company-owned stores and direct sales to consumers, all automakers used a network of independent businesses to sell cars to American buyers. Dealers would buy cars wholesale at set prices from automakers. The price paid by consumers were then negotiated with the dealer.

So while automakers benefit from not having to offer some of the cash-back offers or other incentives to boost demand, the auto dealers are reporting booming profits that come from the higher prices.

AutoNation, the nation's largest car dealership, just reported record quarterly and annual profits Thursday, even though it sold only 2% of the new cars above MSRP in 2021. It did so by selling cars at or near sticker price far more often than in the past.

But many car buyers are upset with the idea of paying over sticker price. And their worries are causing concern among some of the automakers themselves.

Both General Motors and Ford have sent letters to their dealers telling them that they could have their allocation of new vehicles reduced and redirected to other dealers if it's determined they're engaged in what the automakers consider abusive practices.

In particular, GM and Ford are concerned that customers who have put down a deposit for a reservation for upcoming models, particularly EV models like the [Ford F-150 Lightning](#), are being told that they must pay thousands above the list price they expected to pay. Nearly 200,000 Ford customers [made deposits](#) for

a Lightning, for example, and GM has similar reservation list for some of its recent and upcoming EVs, such as the GMC [Hummer EV pickup](#) and the [Cadillac Lyriq](#).

“It has come to our attention that in connection with some of these announcements and launches, a small number of dealers have engaged in practices that do not support a positive sales experience for our customers,” said a letter that Steve Carlisle, president of GM North America, sent to dealers.

“Specifically, it has come to our attention that some dealerships have attempted to demand money above and beyond the reservation amounts set in GM’s program rules and/or have requested customers to pay sums far in excess of MSRP in order to purchase or lease a vehicle.”

Ford spokesperson Said Deep said that Ford has notified dealers about similar concerns surrounding the Lightning, which is due to start production in the spring; customers with reservations could start completing their orders starting on January 4. He added that the company also is looking at the large premiums for other hot models, including the Mustang Mach-E and the Bronco, a gasoline powered car.

But neither automaker said they are outright prohibiting the widespread use of charging over list price by dealers, only when the price is “far in excess” of that benchmark.

AutoNation CEO Michael Manley, who was previously CEO of Fiat Chrysler before it merged with France’s PSA Group to form Stellantis, said he didn’t believe pricing over sticker is a problem for the industry’s reputation. He says prices should be close to the MSRP, and he hopes and expects prices to be closer to that level even once the supply of vehicles is no longer constrained.

“The levels of profitability for both [automaker] and dealers clearly show the benefits of selling vehicles at MSRP. And what a concept, right? Selling at MSRP,” he said to investors. “I think it’s equally clear that significant discounting and high incentives can also damage a brand, which is another reason for our industry to balance appropriately supply and demand.”

If he’s right, that means the days of paying thousands below sticker are over.

Paying over MSRP is not going away any time soon, according to Drury, of Edmunds. With projections that supply of vehicles could remain tight into the second half of this year, it could be 2023 before paying over sticker price becomes rare once again.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	<b>02/20 Millions face polar plunge this week</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.cnn.com/2022/02/20/weather/weather-central-us-cold-snap-snow-storm/index.html">https://www.cnn.com/2022/02/20/weather/weather-central-us-cold-snap-snow-storm/index.html</a>
GIST	<p>After a mild end to the weekend for many states, Old Man Winter will make a comeback as we start off the new workweek.</p> <p>“Temperatures will be 10 to 20 degrees below average over the northern tier states by Monday morning,” the Weather Prediction Center said Saturday.</p> <p>And that’s just the beginning. The thermometer will slip to 30 to 40 degrees below normal by Tuesday and Wednesday, as a strong high pressure system begins to spread Arctic air farther south and east.</p> <p>Many cities will see a sharp polar plunge in a 48-hour span.</p> <p>Denver will go from a high temperature in the low 60s Sunday all the way down to 15 for the peak Tuesday, with snow showers.</p> <p>Rapid City, SD will slide from a high of 50 degrees Sunday to 0 degrees for a high Tuesday. By Tuesday night, the bottom will drop out in the Black Hills to 17 degrees below zero.</p> <p>Some cities will see the drastic drop in temps even more quickly, in a mere 24 hours.</p>

In Amarillo, TX the high temperature Monday will top out in the low 70s, but quickly drop to the mid 30s just one day later.

Wichita, KS will plummet even further, going from a high near 70 Monday down to the mid-20s for a high Tuesday.

Over the next week more than 70% of Americans in the Lower 48 will experience temperatures below the freezing mark. More than 15 million will endure temperatures below zero.

With such cold temperatures already in place, any moisture moving through will result in snow spreading across a wide region.

“Arctic front arrives late Sunday bringing snow, bitter cold, [and] hazardous travel,” the National Weather Service (NWS) office in [Rapid City, SD said](#). They also strongly advised wearing layers, and carrying a winter survival kit if you are traveling.

#### **Frigid cold meets prolonged snow**

The snow will begin across the Upper Midwest, but since the cold front will not move very quickly, it will allow for considerable snowfall rates across the area.

“A long period of snow and gusty northeast winds will begin late Sun night and continue thru Tuesday,” the NWS office in Twin Cities, MN [said in a tweet](#). “Snow may be heavy at times with significant accumulations across parts of the Upper Midwest.”

By Tuesday, sleet, rain and freezing rain will cover the Great Lakes region, where significant ice accumulations are possible.

Approximately 6 inches of snow is forecast across portions of the northern Plains and Midwest through Tuesday, but some areas could see upwards of 12 inches.

The slow movement of the system will also be a concern on the southern side of the storm due to very heavy rain.

“Confidence is increasing that a multiday rainfall event will bring concerns of flooding,” the NWS office in [Nashville said](#).

The bulk of the rain will fall in the Southeast Monday and Tuesday.

The South will be one of the few areas dealing with above average temperatures Monday, which will help fuel severe storms.

The Ark-La-Tex region as well as the lower and mid-Mississippi Valley will see possible tornadoes, large hail and wind damage from Monday afternoon into Monday night.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	02/20 US: all signs suggest Russia invasion
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/blinden-says-all-signs-suggest-russia-brink-invading-ukraine-2022-02-20/">https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/blinden-says-all-signs-suggest-russia-brink-invading-ukraine-2022-02-20/</a>
GIST	WASHINGTON, Feb 20 (Reuters) - U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said everything that's happening on the ground in Ukraine, including the announcement of an extension of military exercises by Russia and Belarus, suggest the world is on the brink of a Russian invasion of Ukraine.

	Speaking on broadcaster CNN'S State of the Union show, Blinken, however, added that the United States was committed until the last minute to using every opportunity to see if diplomacy can dissuade Russian President Vladimir Putin from going ahead with an invasion.
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>02/20 Russia extends military drills near Ukraine</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-russia-united-states-europe-black-sea-a4e14d1b12c119c81d07dd3876cb057b">https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-russia-united-states-europe-black-sea-a4e14d1b12c119c81d07dd3876cb057b</a>
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia extended military drills near Ukraine’s northern borders Sunday amid increased fears that two days of sustained shelling along the contact line between soldiers and Russia-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine could spark an invasion. Ukraine’s president appealed for a cease-fire.</p> <p>The exercises were originally set to end Sunday and brought a sizable contingent of Russian forces to Belarus. The presence of the Russian troops raised concern that they <a href="#">could be used to sweep down on the Ukrainian capital</a>, Kyiv, a city of about 3 million people less than a three-hour drive away.</p> <p>Western leaders warned that Russia was poised to attack its neighbor, which is surrounded on three sides by about 150,000 Russian soldiers, warplanes and equipment. Russia held <a href="#">nuclear drills</a> Saturday as well as the conventional exercises in Belarus, and has ongoing naval drills off the coast in the Black Sea.</p> <p>The United States and many European countries have alleged for months that Russia is trying to create pretexts to invade. They have threatened massive, immediate sanctions if it does.</p> <p>“<a href="#">We’re talking about the potential for war in Europe</a>,” U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris said Sunday at a security conference in Munich, Germany. “It’s been over 70 years, and through those 70 years ... there has been peace and security.”</p> <p>A top European Union official, Charles Michel, said: “The big question remains: does the Kremlin want dialogue?”</p> <p>“We cannot forever offer an olive branch while Russia conducts missile tests and continues to amass troops,” said Michel, the president of the European Council.</p> <p>Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called Saturday on Russian President Vladimir Putin to choose a place where the two leaders could meet to try to resolve the crisis and on Sunday appealed for a cease-fire on Twitter. Russia has denied plans to invade, but the Kremlin had not responded to his offer by Sunday, and it was Belarus — not Russia — that announced the extension of the drills.</p> <p>NATO has estimated there are 30,000 Russian troops in Belarus.</p> <p>In Kyiv, life continued seemingly as usual on Sunday, with brunches and church services in full swing. Katerina Spanchak, who fled the separatist-occupied Lugansk region years ago, said she prayed for peace.</p> <p>“We are people, we all love life, and we are all united by our love of life. We should appreciate it every day. That’s why I think everything will be fine,” Spanchak said outside services at St. Michael’s monastery.</p> <p>But in Lugansk, the area of eastern Ukraine where her parents still live, and neighboring Donetsk, separatist leaders ordered a full military mobilization and sent more civilians to Russia, which has issued about 700,000 passports to residents of the rebel-held territories. Claims that Russian citizens are being endangered might be used as justification for military action.</p>

Officials in the separatist territories claimed Ukrainian forces launched several artillery attacks over the past day and that two civilians were killed during an unsuccessful assault on a village near the Russian border. Ukraine's military said two soldiers died in firing from the separatist side on Saturday.

Ukraine's leader criticized the U.S. and other Western nations for holding back on new sanctions for Russia. Zelenskyy, in comments before the conference, also questioned the West's refusal to allow Ukraine to join NATO immediately. Putin has demanded that NATO reject Ukraine as a member.

In new signs of fears of imminent war, Germany and Austria told their citizens to leave Ukraine, and NATO's liaison office in Kyiv pulled staff to Brussels and to the western Ukraine city of Lviv.

U.S. President Joe Biden said late Friday that based on the latest American intelligence, he was now "convinced" that Putin has decided to invade Ukraine in coming days and assault the capital.

A U.S. military official said an estimated 40% to 50% of the ground forces surrounding Ukraine had moved into attack positions closer to the border. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal U.S. assessments, said the change had been underway for about a week and did not necessarily mean Putin was committed to an invasion.

Lines of communication between Moscow and the West remain open: French President Emmanuel Macron spoke with Putin on Sunday for nearly two hours before a 30-minute call with the Ukrainian president. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov agreed to meet next week.

Blinken said Sunday the U.S. was still working every lever possible to try to dissuade Putin from invading Ukraine but said recent events, including the extension of the troops in Belarus and the increase in shelling along the contact line, showed Putin well underway in laying the pretexts and groundwork for invasion, in line with findings of U.S. intelligence and previous Russian territorial grabs. "He is following the script almost to the letter," Blinken told CNN.

"Up to the last minute, there is still an option for him to pull back," Blinken told NBC's Meet the Press. He said his offer to meet Lavrov in Europe in the coming days was conditioned on Russia not rolling into Ukraine beforehand.

Macron's office said both the Ukrainian and Russian leaders had agreed to work toward a diplomatic solution "in coming days and coming weeks."

Immediate worries focused on eastern Ukraine, where Ukrainian forces have been fighting the pro-Russia rebels since 2014 in a conflict that has killed some 14,000 people.

Ukraine and the separatist leaders traded accusations of escalation. Russia on Saturday said at least two shells fired from a government-held part of eastern Ukraine landed across the border, but Ukraine's foreign minister dismissed that claim as "a fake statement."

"When tension is escalated to the maximum, as it is now, for example, on the line of contact, then any spark, any unplanned incident or any minor planned provocation can lead to irreparable consequences," Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov said in an interview that aired Sunday on Russian state television.

On the front lines, Ukrainian soldiers said they were under orders not to return fire. Zahar Leshushun, peering into the distance with a periscope, had followed the news all day from a trench where he is posted near the town of Zolote.

"Right now, we don't respond to their fire because ..." the soldier said before being interrupted by the sound of an incoming shell. "Oh! They are shooting at us now. They are aiming at the command post."

Sporadic violence has broken out for years along the line separating Ukrainian forces from the Russia-backed separatists, but the spike in recent days is orders of magnitude higher than anything recently recorded by international monitors: nearly 1,500 explosions in 24 hours.

Denis Pushilin, the head of the pro-Russia separatist government in Ukraine's Donetsk region, cited an "immediate threat of aggression" from Ukrainian forces in his announcement of a call to arms. Ukrainian officials vehemently denied having plans to take rebel-controlled areas by force.

A similar statement followed from his counterpart in the Luhansk region. On Friday, the rebels began evacuating civilians to Russia with an announcement that appeared to be part of their and Moscow's efforts to paint Ukraine as the aggressor.

Metadata from two videos posted by the separatists announcing the evacuation of civilians to Russia show that the files were created two days ago, the AP confirmed. U.S. authorities have alleged that the Kremlin's effort to come up with an invasion pretext could include staged, prerecorded videos.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	<b>02/19 Western Europe cleanup after deadly storm</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/uk-cleans-storm-leaves-dead-europe-82998599">https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/uk-cleans-storm-leaves-dead-europe-82998599</a>
GIST	<p>LONDON -- Crews cleared fallen trees and worked to restore power to about 400,000 people in Britain as Western Europe cleaned up Saturday after one of the most damaging storms in years.</p> <p>At least 12 people were killed, many by falling trees, in Ireland, Britain, Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany. Named Storm Eunice by the British and Irish weather services, and Storm Zeynep in Germany, Friday's storm was the second to hit the region in a week.</p> <p>Winds toppled the spire of a church in Wells, southwest England, ripped off parts of the domed roof of London's O2 Arena and left a trail of felled trees and damaged buildings across several countries.</p> <p>A gust of 122 miles an hour (196 kilometers an hour) was provisionally recorded Friday on the Isle of Wight. If confirmed, it would be the highest ever in England. Hurricane-force winds begin at 74 mph.</p> <p>The Met Office weather service said more strong winds would hit the southern coasts of England and Wales on Saturday, with the potential for further damage, while snow and ice could cause disruption further north.</p> <p>The U.K.'s National Rail association said "routes across most of Great Britain" remained affected by the weather on Saturday morning, with disruptions to continue throughout the day.</p> <p>Transport in Germany also remained severely disrupted, with railway operator Deutsche Bahn saying no long-distance trains would operate north of Dortmund, Hannover and Berlin until at least 6 p.m.</p> <p>The storm left at least three people dead in Germany, including a man who fell as he was trying to repair a damaged roof and a driver whose car crashed into a tree that had fallen across a road.</p> <p>In the northwestern city of Bremen, a 55-meter (180-foot) crane fell onto an unfinished office building.</p> <p>A cleanup also was underway in the Netherlands, where four people died as Eunice tore across the country on Friday.</p> <p>Train services, halted during the storm, remained disrupted with the company responsible for rail infrastructure saying that it was working hard to repair "extensive" damage to tracks and overhead power lines.</p> <p>Engineers were expected to assess damage to the roof of a stadium in The Hague where professional soccer team ADO The Hague plays its home matches after parts of the structure were blown loose.</p>

	Across the country, teams were shifting fallen trees and beginning to repair roofs damaged by the storm.
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>02/19 G7: de-escalate; costly invasion sanctions</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/feb/19/g-7-countries-call-kremlin-de-escalate-warn-costly/">https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/feb/19/g-7-countries-call-kremlin-de-escalate-warn-costly/</a>
GIST	<p>Foreign ministers from the Group of Seven countries on Saturday urged Russia to de-escalate tensions along the border with Ukraine warning of “massive consequences” from sanctions in the event of “further military aggression.”</p> <p>The group said they remain “gravely concerned about Russia’s threatening build-up around Ukraine,” and said they have seen “no evidence” of a troop drawdown despite the Kremlin’s assurances.</p> <p>“Russia’s unprovoked and unjustified massing of military forces, the largest deployment on the European continent since the end of the Cold War is a challenge to global security and the international order,” the foreign ministers said.</p> <p>The group welcomed Russia’s willingness to engage diplomatically but said they are prepared to impose severe sanctions should the Kremlin further escalate militarily.</p> <p>“While we are ready to explore diplomatic solutions to address legitimate security concerns, Russia should be in no doubt that any further military aggression against Ukraine will have massive consequences, including financial and economic sanctions on a wide array of sectoral and individual targets that would impose severe and unprecedented costs on the Russian economy,” the group wrote.</p> <p>Tensions in Eastern Europe have reached a tipping point amid Russia’s troop buildup along Ukraine’s border.</p> <p>Russia has amassed nearly 150,000 troops along Ukraine’s border, sparking fears among Western leaders that Russian President Vladimir Putin intends to invade.</p> <p>Russian President Vladimir Putin has denied that Russia intends to invade neighboring Ukraine and has claimed it has begun removing troops from the border.</p> <p>But the U.S. says there has been no evidence that Russia intends to deescalate and has warned that the window for further diplomacy is narrowing.</p> <p>President Biden said Friday that he is “convinced” that Mr. Putin has made the decision to invade and said an assault on Kyiv may be imminent.</p> <p>Western leaders have warned that Moscow might use skirmishes in Ukraine’s war-torn regions near the Russian border as a pretext for a full-scale invasion.</p> <p>Ukrainian forces have been engaged in a nearly eight-year standoff with pro-Russian separatists. Violence between the two groups has escalated in recent days amid a Russian troop buildup along its border with Ukraine.</p> <p>The White House has committed to avoiding a direct clash between U.S. and Russian troops, though President Biden has committed to bolstering U.S. support to NATO.</p> <p>The White House has also warned of severe sanctions in the event of a Russian invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>Speaking at the annual Munich Security Conference earlier Saturday Vice President Kamala Harris voiced stark warnings for the Kremlin.</p>



<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	<p>“Let me be clear, I can say with absolute certainty: If Russia further invades Ukraine, the United States, together with our allies and partners, will impose significant and unprecedented economic costs,” Harris said.</p> <p>In a meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy later Saturday, Ms. Harris called the current standoff “a decisive moment in our world’s history” and reiterated the Biden administration’s pledge to impose “swift and severe economic sanctions” in the event of an invasion.</p> <p>“Any threats to your country, we take seriously, and we have rallied our Allies and our partners to speak with one voice,” Ms. Harris said.</p> <p>The statement from the foreign ministers echoed Western leaders’ solidarity with Ukraine.</p> <p>“We reiterate our unwavering commitment to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders and territorial waters,” the group said. “We reaffirm the right of any sovereign state to determine its future and security arrangements. We commend Ukraine’s posture of restraint in the face of continued provocations and efforts at destabilization.”</p>
-------------------------------	---

HEADLINE	02/20 American self-censorship—for China
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/20/briefing/china-us-censorship.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/20/briefing/china-us-censorship.html</a>
GIST	<p>Before the Winter Olympics, <a href="#">Chinese officials</a> cautioned athletes against speaking out about topics that cast them in a bad light. Then, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi <a href="#">told</a> American athletes not to anger the Chinese authorities.</p> <p>It was the latest sign that China’s campaign to stifle dissent is succeeding in an important way: U.S. institutions and businesses are increasingly silencing themselves to avoid angering the Chinese government.</p> <p>The professional wrestler and actor John Cena <a href="#">apologized</a>, in Mandarin, last year for calling Taiwan a country. In 2019, a Houston Rockets executive <a href="#">apologized</a> for tweeting support for pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong after Chinese officials complained, and a top video game publisher <a href="#">suspended</a> an e-sports competitor who voiced support for the protests. The 2013 movie “World War Z” was <a href="#">rewritten</a> to clarify that its zombie-spawning virus didn’t originate in China.</p> <p>Erich Schwartzel, the author of “Red Carpet,” which is about China’s relationship with Hollywood, told me that one number drives these decisions: 1.4 billion, China’s population.</p> <p>American businesses and institutions want access to this enormous market. Given China’s authoritarian leadership, that means playing by the Chinese Communist Party’s rules — and, in particular, avoiding criticism of its human rights abuses. So cultural institutions that are influential bastions of American values like free expression are now frequently absent from public conversations about China.</p> <p><b>Compromising values</b></p> <p>U.S. sports and media have often showcased American values, even if clumsily or unfairly. These cultural exports helped spread democratic ideas internationally during the Cold War. Movies like “Mr. Smith Goes to Washington” or “Selma,” which celebrate democracy, justice and equality, can change how people view the world and how it works. Celebrities can push people to vote or get vaccinated, or put a spotlight on neglected problems.</p> <p>Censorship prevents these institutions from shining a light on China as its leaders oppress dissidents, crack down on democracy in Hong Kong, round up and detain ethnic Uyghurs and threaten war with Taiwan.</p> <p>Asked about business in China in an <a href="#">interview with the Times Opinion writer Kara Swisher</a>, the former Disney C.E.O. Bob Iger acknowledged the reality facing Hollywood: “You try in the process not to compromise what I’ll call values. But there are compromises that companies have to make to be global.”</p>

A recent example of censorship appears in “Top Gun: Maverick,” set to premiere in U.S. theaters this year. In the original 1986 movie, Tom Cruise’s character, the U.S. Navy aviator Pete Mitchell, wore a jacket with patches of the Taiwanese and Japanese flags. In the coming sequel, those flags are gone.

As Schwartzel [reported](#), Chinese investors told movie executives that the Taiwanese flag was a problem because China doesn’t consider Taiwan independent. Playing it safe, the executives also removed the Japanese flag because of Japan’s own historical tensions with China.

In the meantime, Chinese studios are getting better at making movies, and they’re not afraid to take an anti-American stance. In 2017’s popular “Wolf Warrior 2,” the Chinese hero Leng Feng saves African villagers from an American mercenary called Big Daddy, who proclaims his people’s supremacy moments before Leng triumphs and kills him.

The consequences are asymmetrical. Chinese movies proudly showcase their country’s values while American movies remain silent about China — skewing the messages people hear not just in the U.S. and China but across the globe.

American movies can even give the impression that China is better. In the 2014 movie “Transformers: Age of Extinction,” U.S. officials were portrayed “in unflattering tones,” according to [PEN America](#). The Chinese characters in the film, which was made with the Chinese government’s support, were more often selfless and heroic. Variety [called](#) the movie “a splendidly patriotic film, if you happen to be Chinese.”

“Transformers” made more than \$1 billion at the box office — \$300 million of it from China. From a business perspective, it was a success.

### **A growing problem**

The pull of censorship stands to grow as China’s economy, and therefore the potential market for U.S. businesses, also grows.

Some American lawmakers [have tried](#) to address the problem, but any change in U.S. policy would most likely have little effect. The same free-speech rights those politicians defend also make it hard for them to tell Hollywood, the N.B.A. or anyone else what to do.

Another issue: The most striking and obvious examples of censorship have involved blatant interventions by Chinese officials. But U.S. businesses are more frequently doing what Yaqiu Wang at Human Rights Watch calls anticipatory self-censorship: “Before the idea of a movie is even conceived, the first thing they need to think is, ‘How can I make sure that this movie can be shown in China?’”

That kind of self-censorship is harder to detect — or do anything about.

Ultimately, American institutions may have to make their own choice: Reject censorship or maintain access to China. Right now, desire for access is winning.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	02/20 New Mexico National Guard in classrooms
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/20/us/politics/substitute-teachers-national-guard-new-mexico.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/20/us/politics/substitute-teachers-national-guard-new-mexico.html</a>
GIST	<p>ESTANCIA, N.M. — The chorus of small voices ringing from a third-grade classroom on a recent morning signaled how far Estancia Elementary School had come in resuming a sense of normalcy after the latest coronavirus surge.</p> <p>Students in the small, remote community of Estancia, N.M., were enthusiastically engaged in a vocabulary lesson, enunciating words with a “bossy r,” as well as homophones and homonyms, and spelling them on white boards.</p>

But there was also a sign of how far the district, about an hour outside Albuquerque, still had to go. The teacher moving about the classroom and calling on students to use the words in a sentence was clad in camouflage. “My substitute is wearing gear,” one student responded.

“Yes,” Lt. Col. Susana Corona replied, beaming. “The superintendent allows me to wear my uniform. I’m wearing a pair of boots.”

For the last month, dozens of soldiers and airmen and women in the New Mexico National Guard have been deployed to classrooms throughout the state to help with crippling pandemic-related staff shortages. Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham has also enlisted civilian state employees — herself included — to volunteer as substitute teachers.

New Mexico has been the only state to deploy National Guard troops in classrooms. But since the fall, when districts around the country [began recruiting any qualified adult](#) to take over classrooms temporarily, several other states have turned to uniformed personnel. National Guard [members in Massachusetts have driven school buses](#), and last month, [police officers in one city](#) in Oklahoma served as substitutes.

The scenes of uniformed officers in classrooms have [solicited mixed reactions](#). Some teachers see it as a slight against their profession, and a way to avoid tackling longstanding problems like low teacher pay. Other critics [have worried that putting more uniformed officers](#) in schools could create anxiety in student populations that have historically had hostile experiences with law enforcement.

But the presence of New Mexico’s state militia — whose members are trained to help with floods, freezes and fires as well as combat missions overseas — has largely been embraced by schools as a complicated but critical step toward recovery. Teachers have expressed gratitude for “extra bodies,” as one put it. Students were mostly unfazed but aware that, as Scarlett Tourville, a third grader in Colonel Corona’s class put it, “This is not normal.”

Superintendents were given the choice of whether to have the guardsmen and women wear regular clothes or duty uniforms; most joined Cindy L. Sims, the superintendent of the Estancia Municipal School District, in choosing the latter. “I wanted the kids to know she was here, to know why she was here,” Dr. Sims said. “I wanted them to see strength and community.”

For Dr. Sims, Colonel Corona’s presence breathed new life into a campus that had been scarred by death. In December alone, Dr. Sims attended seven funerals of people who died from Covid-19. Among them: the husband of a staff member who had contracted the disease at school and took it home, and a father who left behind a first-, seventh- and twelfth-grader. The week before Christmas, the district held a double funeral in the high school gymnasium for a father and grandmother of two students.

“Trying to have school at a time when everybody’s heart was broken was very difficult,” Dr. Sims said. “Our mission is to keep hope alive, and the National Guard is helping us do that.”

Colonel Corona, an intelligence officer in the New Mexico Guard, deployed to a number of states and countries during 10 years of active duty in the Air Force. She never envisioned that one of her missions would require being armed with a lesson plan, wet naps, and dry-erase markers.

But nor did she envision watching her own fourth grader try to learn from her teacher through a screen last year.

“You always have to be ready when there’s a need,” she said, “when there’s a call to service.”

### **Keeping the Doors Open**

Staff shortages are the latest hurdle for school districts navigating a pandemic that is about to enter its third year.

Coronavirus-related illnesses, quarantines and [job-related stress have hit many districts hard](#). But the country's education leaders say the pandemic is just accelerating trends that were at least a decade in the making.

The National Education Association, the nation's largest teacher's union, [published a survey this month](#) that found 55 percent of educators were thinking about leaving the profession earlier than they had planned, up from 37 percent in August. Three-fourths of members said that widespread absences had required them to fill in for colleagues or take on other duties, and 80 percent reported that unfilled job openings had led to more work obligations.

"Crisis is the word we have to use now," said Becky Pringle, the association's president, describing the enlistment of the guard as a "stopgap."

"We know just putting an adult in front of kids is not going to result in the instruction they deserve," she added.

At Belen High School, in a farming community less than an hour south of Albuquerque, the staffing crunch has been felt acutely.

The high school reopened for in-person learning last spring. But by fall, it was short about a half-dozen teachers. One day there were 10 teachers out, and another six classes piled in the auditorium. Eliseo Aguirre, the principal, said he believed the death of a teacher from Covid had a chilling effect on teacher and substitute applications.

The arrival of Airman First Class Jennifer Marquez last month was a "blessing," Mr. Aguirre said. On a recent Wednesday, she was covering a Spanish class — her third subject in two weeks.

"We're going to use her every day until she gets orders that she has to go back," Mr. Aguirre said, "which I hope isn't until the end of the year."

Veronica Pería, a freshman at Belen, was happy to see her, too. She said her grades suffered last semester, when her teachers were absent and random staff members were popping in and out of her classes, leading to inconsistent instruction. "It's better than watching a video or something," she said of having Ms. Marquez filling in. "It's good to have someone I can go to and ask for help."

Royceann LaFayette, a counselor at Belen, said the realities of New Mexico having among the country's highest childhood poverty rates and lowest average teacher salaries had collided during the pandemic in a way she had not seen in her 29 years working in the state's education system. State lawmakers just passed legislation that will raise teachers' base salary by an average of 20 percent, starting this summer.

"The image that comes to mind," she said, "is walking into a grocery store and seeing bare shelves."

### **'Semper Gumby'**

When the call came from the governor, the New Mexico National Guard's commander in chief, Brig. Gen. Jamison Herrera, knew he would have no trouble recruiting volunteers for Operation Supporting Teachers and Families (S.T.A.F.).

Many guardsmen and women had already seen how the pandemic affects students up close, having delivered meals to those at risk of going hungry when schools closed.

The Guard estimated that 50 of its members would volunteer; by this week, the state education department had issued licenses to 96.

The volunteers are on state active duty, paid through the state's budget, similar to when they help with evacuations and search-and-rescue missions. Even those with the highest security clearances were required

to go through the background check process and meet the same state licensing requirements as any other substitute applicant.

Although some members have advanced degrees, or certifications that could translate to the classroom — a welder is teaching shop class in one district, for example — General Herrera, a former teacher, impressed upon his team they were there to accomplish one goal.

“We are there to support the learning objectives of the teacher, because we certainly know we can’t fill their shoes,” he said.

Above all else, he told them, stay “Semper Gumby.”

To demonstrate how the unofficial military motto, meaning “Always Flexible,” could apply in the classroom, the Guard brought in Gwen Perea Warniment, the deputy secretary of teaching, learning and assessment for the New Mexico Public Education Department, to provide some quick training.

“I wanted to highlight that the classroom was not going to be like the Guard; it’s going to be similar to a beehive — organized chaos,” she said.

She taught the basics of how to read a lesson plan, and what to do without one; classroom management strategies, like “1,2,3, eyes on me,” and how to approach a challenging student with curiosity, not combativeness.

Some of those lessons were on full display recently at Parkview Elementary School, in Socorro, N.M., about an hour south of Albuquerque in the Rio Grande Valley.

The Guard specifically sought volunteers to go to schools like this one, in hard-to-reach places, with hard-to-reach students. The school was shocked when Staff Sgt. Rainah Myers-Garcia reported for duty.

“When I saw the governor say it on TV, I thought there’s no way we’d get one because the big city schools get everything,” said Laurie Ocampo, the school’s principal. “And here she is, with a cape — or should I say, camo.”

Sergeant Myers-Garcia, a Guard member for 12 years, spent her first week with curious pre-kindergarteners reciting the names of food items and farm animals, and supervising recess with first graders who called her “Ms. Soldier” and asked her to babysit their dolls.

Her second week took her to a class of boisterous fifth graders who greeted her one recent day with, “Oh, you’re still here.”

The first day of that assignment was tough. The teacher’s absence was unexpected, so there were no lesson plans. She relied on Google searches to handle a fraction lesson, and stern warnings to get through the day.

“In their defense, their teacher’s not here and they have a soldier for a teacher,” she said.

The next morning, she arrived ready to be “Semper Gumby.” She had worksheets her mother had printed out for a morning icebreaker, a bag of prizes she had purchased from Wal-Mart, and two lesson plans she had borrowed from other teachers.

When she encountered the young man who had given her the most trouble the day before, she soothed his brewing tantrum by asking a simple question: Do you need help?

“We’re going to get through it, even if it’s painful,” Sergeant Myers-Garcia said. “I still prefer to be here than the kids not being in school.”

	<p>Colonel Corona has an open invitation to stay on as a substitute in Estancia. Dr. Sims, the superintendent, choked back tears when asked what will happen when her tour of duty ends. “It’s been a game-changer having Susana here,” she said. “You might think one isn’t enough; one was just enough.”</p> <p>When Stephanie Romans had to spend five days in quarantine recently, the teacher of 37 years was apprehensive about her fourth-grade students falling behind.</p> <p>But her fears eased when Colonel Corona called one night to ask it if was OK if she did not move on to a new math concept. She did not think the students fully grasped the one she had taught that day, she told Ms. Romans.</p> <p>“I gave them a test on the math material when I got back and — boom — they did awesome,” Ms. Romans said.</p> <p>Colonel Corona said she employed the same skills — command and confidence — that she did on any mission.</p> <p>“I answered the call to service,” she said. “What this really should inspire is a greater respect for what teachers do every day.”</p>
	<a href="#">Return to Top</a>

HEADLINE	<b>02/19 Fury over Covid rules erupts in rural Calif.</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/feb/20/covid-restrictions-extremist-groups-local-politics-rural-california">https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/feb/20/covid-restrictions-extremist-groups-local-politics-rural-california</a>
GIST	<p>Residents of a California county are mounting an aggressive campaign to oust officials who have supported Covid safety measures and vaccines, the latest example of a growing extremism in local politics fueled by the pandemic.</p> <p>A group in Nevada county, a rural expanse of about 100,000 people in the Sierra Nevada, is seeking to recall five county supervisors, saying that contact tracing efforts and the promotion of lockdowns and vaccines violate “religious freedoms and individual liberty”.</p> <p>The effort comes on the heels of a successful recall campaign further north in Shasta county, where voters ousted Leonard Moty, a Republican supervisor and retired police chief. The Shasta county election, which followed nearly two years of threats and increasing hostility toward the longtime supervisor and his moderate colleagues, gave control of the board of supervisors to a group supported by local militia members.</p> <p>Both campaigns shared extreme rhetoric and in some cases aggression driven by discontent over Covid restrictions and rooted in a deep distrust of institutions. This antagonism has only accelerated during the pandemic, even in largely Democratic states like California. Experts warn angst over Covid rules, inflamed by social media, has become a gateway to extremism.</p> <p>Shasta county activists pitched their recall as a fight for “freedom” while the Nevada county recall campaign has accused supervisors of “promoting corruption” and enabling “crimes against humanity”.</p> <p>Nevada county officials have said the recall attempt is a “desperate effort” by a vocal minority who are pushing false and misleading information.</p> <p>“I did not enable ‘crimes against humanity’, I sought to protect citizens’ health in the face of a deadly virus,” Supervisor Dan Miller said in response to the filing.</p> <p>Experts say extreme language is becoming increasingly common in local politics and public meetings, even those that have historically been staid and orderly affairs.</p>

“We’ve seen an increase in threats against public officials and an increase in the climate of conflict,” said Brian Levin, the director of the Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism at California State University, Long Beach. “Whether it’s supervisors or school board officials, we are now seeing an in-your-face brazenness with regard to personal interactions, but it’s also spread culturally.”

In northern California, small groups with extreme beliefs have tapped into existing discontent over Covid restrictions, attracting residents who have long felt unheard or ignored by state officials, Levin said.

“This kind of activity in northern California is a symptom and manifestation of how widespread and dispersed extremism can be and why it has particularly gained traction in rural areas,” Levin said.

The last few years have been volatile, the Nevada county supervisor Sue Hoek said, with officials and staff subjected to personal threats amid growing anger over the pandemic. “We didn’t make Covid, but it’s our job to try to keep all of our community safe,” she said.

Calvin Clark, a proponent of the recall, says the effort is a grassroots movement in which about 200 residents are involved. “This is simply the citizens asking for accountability from their elected representatives,” he said.

The recall campaign in Nevada county has only just officially kicked off – organizers have 120 days to gather enough signatures to get the measure on the ballot – but the effort has already created tension. The county’s registrar of voters recently closed its office after maskless proponents of the recall “stormed” the office and pushed a worker, officials said. In December, the board of supervisors called for a recess amid a rowdy meeting in which recall supporters demanded the officials be removed from their posts.

Clark said officials had falsely painted the recall as extremist, and that he and others were simply trying to have their grievances addressed. Invoking a talking point of the far right, he compared government Covid policies to living in Nazi Germany. “As they said in Germany, ‘Just get on the train.’ We’re not doing that. We’re not going to Auschwitz,” he told the Guardian. “It’s not about vaccines,” he said. “It’s about the liberty to choose how you’re going to live and if you’re going to give your rights to five elected representatives.”

The Nevada county supervisors have had to call for recesses several times during the pandemic in order to de-escalate tense meetings, Hoek said. “It is one of our rights to speak up and have freedom of speech. I just wish sometimes we could do that a little more civilly,” she said. “I think we’re doing everything we can to keep things from escalating and let them be heard.”

Disruptions and threats have been seen in public meetings across the country amid strife over pandemic health rules. A county commission in Oregon moved to virtual meetings last month due to anti-mask protesters. In Virginia, a parent was arrested after threatening to bring guns if officials didn’t make masks optional.

“Distrust in government has permeated the most local levels,” Colin Clarke, a terrorism expert, told the Guardian earlier this month. “I’m familiar with the indicators of extremism and radicalization. I see them in places I never expected to see them. If you had told me as a terrorism expert I’d be talking about school boards, I’d have said you’re crazy.”

Discord in rural politics has also been driven in part by pent-up anger from residents who feel they’re not getting a fair shake from the government, said Lisa Pruitt, an expert on rural law at University of California, Davis. That anger has trickled down from state leaders to local officials who people believe aren’t doing enough. The divisive state of American politics has only created more tension.

“I can’t help but believe that had we not been in such a fractured political moment, the pandemic might not have become so political and people might not have responded in such emotionally charged ways,” Pruitt said. But that phenomenon can be seen across the US, she added.



	<p>“I can’t see anything about this that seems unique to Nevada county,” Pruitt said. “We’re seeing uncivil behavior at public meetings and in public places. We’re seeing these really heated political clashes.”</p> <p>Regardless of the outcome, the use of extreme rhetoric in politics is cause for concern, Levin said. “People [might] dismiss it as hypercharged rhetoric,” he said. “Calling someone a traitor, talking about crimes against humanity, is part of the way individuals turn the spotlight away from their use of violence-glorifying rhetoric. People labeling their political opponents as traitors and criminals – we’ve seen what the results are in lesser republics than ours.”</p> <p>Despite the division in Nevada county, Hoek said she was proud of what officials had achieved amid the pandemic, from new housing to broadband projects, and is hopeful for the area’s future. “There are some challenges. Sometimes I go home and shake my head. But you know what, it doesn’t deter me from doing my job,” she said. “It’s worth it.”</p>
	<a href="#">Return to Top</a>

<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>02/20 Police continuing to clear Ottawa protesters</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/discover-cool-canada/2022/feb/20/ottawa-police-protesters-canada-capital-trudeau-truckers">https://www.theguardian.com/discover-cool-canada/2022/feb/20/ottawa-police-protesters-canada-capital-trudeau-truckers</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>Canadian police on Sunday were making possibly a final push to clear the capital city, Ottawa, of demonstrators who have paralyzed it by parking and camping on the streets for more than three weeks to protest against pandemic restrictions.</p> <p>Police have made 170 arrests and towed 53 vehicles since they began efforts to bust up the protest on Friday morning. To do so required the prime minister, Justin Trudeau, to invoke rarely used emergency powers.</p> <p>On Saturday, police used pepper spray and stun grenades to move out the diehard protesters who have remained, clearing most of the area in front of parliament and next to the prime minister’s office.</p> <p>But pockets of protesters still remain. Some of those arrested on Saturday wore body armor and had smoke grenades and other fireworks in their bags and vehicles, police said.</p> <p>“This operation is still moving forward,” Ottawa’s interim police chief, Steve Bell, said on Saturday. “It is not over and it will take more time until we have achieved our goals.”</p> <p>The protesters initially wanted an end to cross-border Covid-19 vaccine mandates for truck drivers, but the blockade turned into a demonstration against Trudeau and the government.</p> <p>Trudeau invoked emergency powers to give his government wider authority to stop the protests, including sweeping powers to freeze the accounts of those suspected of supporting the blockades, without obtaining a court order.</p> <p>“Police are making their way through the streets methodically and responsibly. This is encouraging, but the work is not yet done,” the public safety minister, Marco Mendicino, said on Saturday.</p> <p>Protesters, who have been filmed by police, will be held accountable, Bell said.</p> <p>“We will actively look to identify you and follow up with financial sanctions and criminal charges. ... This investigation will go on for months to come.”</p>
	<a href="#">Return to Top</a>

<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>02/19 Experts caution cannot treat as endemic</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/20/us-covid-coronavirus-mask-mandates-warning-experts">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/20/us-covid-coronavirus-mask-mandates-warning-experts</a>
<b>GIST</b>	As some US companies begin asking people to return to the office and governors lift mask mandates, talk has emerged of life after the Covid-19 pandemic in America.

But infectious disease experts aren't quite ready to declare that it's safe for individuals, rather than governments and health officials, to determine whether precautions such as masking indoors are necessary.

"I think it's probably reasonable not to get too cocky at this point," said Jennifer Nuzzo, an epidemiologist at the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security. "I welcome the decline in cases that we are seeing in the US and a number of other countries, and I think you can both celebrate the sunshine while also keeping an umbrella close by for the possibility that rain could occur."

The numbers of Covid cases and hospitalizations in the United States have decreased by 67% and 38% over the last two weeks, according to data from the New York Times.

Amid that decline, Democratic governors in Massachusetts, Illinois, New York, Rhode Island, California, Connecticut, Delaware, New Jersey and Oregon have recently lifted at least some parts of the masking mandates.

California governor Gavin Newsom on Thursday announced a plan based on the idea that we are entering an endemic stage, meaning the virus is no longer a significant threat in some areas, rather than a pandemic, meaning a global outbreak.

That new approach includes a focus on countering misinformation and disinformation and mass testing to spot new variants and surges, according to the Associated Press.

US companies, most notably, Microsoft, have also announced plans to reopen their facilities and asked employees to return. And Amazon, where many people already worked in person, announced that it would not require fully vaccinated employees to wear masks, according to the Wall Street Journal.

"While the world has changed, our dedication to the safety and wellbeing of our employees has remained constant," Microsoft said in a blogpost about the reopening. "As we navigate this new phase of work, we'll continue to take a data-driven approach to decision making that follows the guidance of public health authorities."

But Justin Lessler, an epidemiology professor at the University of North Carolina, says that while the numbers of Covid cases, deaths and hospitalizations have recently plummeted, the fact that the Omicron spike was so much higher than previous waves has misled people into thinking that they no longer need to wear masks or avoid mass gatherings. The US daily average of cases and hospitalizations on 16 February were about 124,000 and 81,000, according to the Times.

Before removing precautions, Lessler said he would like to see Covid levels like late June 2021 – before the Delta wave – when the daily averages of new cases and hospitalizations were about 12,000 and 16,000.

Modeling shows the US could achieve that around late March, he said.

"In most of the country, cases, deaths and hospitalizations are still extremely high, and I certainly hope that's not the new normal, and I don't believe it's the new normal," Lessler said. "I worry that the perception that we are already there is going to lead people to act in ways that is going to draw this out longer than it needs to be drawn out."

William Schaffner, an infectious diseases expert at Vanderbilt University School of Medicine, also thinks that we cannot yet treat the virus as though it is endemic.

"Some governors think we are almost there already – they are dropping mask mandates – and my response is: good luck to you," said Schaffner. "My fingers are crossed on your behalf."

Almost the entire country remains at what the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention defines as high transmission of the virus, meaning a seven-day daily average of more than 100 new Covid cases per 100,000 residents.

Anna Bershteyn, assistant professor in the department of population health at New York University, thinks more companies will ask employees to return once their surrounding county drops at least to a level of “substantial transmission,” meaning less than 100 new cases per 100,000 residents. Companies will also consider the vaccination levels of their workforce and the severity of a new variant, among other factors, Bershteyn said.

She recommends employers use a framework of “always measures,” such as increasing clean air exchanges in indoor spaces; and ensuring that workers are fully vaccinated and stay home when sick; “sometimes measures,” when case numbers are higher, such as mandating masks and proof of vaccination to be on the premises; and “rarely measures,” such as temporarily closing a business.

Also, “people can reduce their risk in the long term for Covid-19 by improving general health, so taking the opportunity when transmission is low to catch up on any health care that has been missed ... staying on top of weight, exercise and diet; and recovering economic losses and educational losses; and really importantly, restoring some of the social connections and those activities that are really important to a person’s wellbeing,” said Bershteyn.

Nuzzo, the Johns Hopkins epidemiologist, also thinks that the country needs to end its binary thinking on precautions, “that we either care about the virus and are trying to do something about it – or we’re not,” she said.

“The option not to care is not an option, but how we try to address the virus can and should change with the data,” she said. “That may include shifting from mandatory measures to recommended measures ... It may mean that we put masks at the front of the entrance to the coffee shop for people to take if they so choose, but we don’t have the poor barista have to yell at somebody and call the police if somebody is not wearing a mask.”

Nuzzo and other epidemiologists also do not take it as a given that a new variant won’t emerge that overcomes the population’s immunity against the virus.

“It’s not like you are going down on a rollercoaster and are just going to keep on cruising. We could see the cases go up again, and I think we have to be mentally and socially prepared that if we are experiencing another surge, we may have to dust off some measures that we got to take a break from,” she said.

Dr Celine Gounder, an infectious disease specialist and epidemiologist at New York University, also thinks the pandemic will be shaped by individuals’ risk tolerance and how well we protect demographics such as low-income populations and residents of long-term care facilities. That means, for example, ensuring that everyone at a nursing home is vaccinated and boosted.

“Instead of having top-down recommendations for everyone, we are entering a phase soon where what we need to be doing is arming people with the information and tools to protect themselves and their loved ones,” she said. “And as opposed to blanket recommendations for the whole population, we need to really focus our public health efforts on the most vulnerable.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	02/19 West to arm resistance if Russia invades?
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/19/west-plans-to-arm-resistance-if-russian-forces-occupy-ukraine">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/19/west-plans-to-arm-resistance-if-russian-forces-occupy-ukraine</a>
GIST	Secret discussions are under way between western allies over how to arm what they expect to be fierce Ukrainian resistance in the event of a Russian invasion that topples the Kyiv government.

Boris Johnson laid bare the case for such a move in a dramatic speech to the Munich security conference where he stated it was in the collective self-interests of the west for any Russian invasion [to “fail and be seen to fail”](#).

He said that any invasion would lead to “a generation of bloodshed and misery” as Ukrainians would fight a fierce campaign to resist Russian forces.

The message was underscored in a meeting between Johnson and the Ukrainian president, [Volodymyr Zelenskiy](#), on the margins of the Munich conference where the two men predicted a fierce resistance to an invasion.

Similar discussions have been taking place in the US, where reports suggest the country’s national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, has told senators that the US is willing to arm a resistance and is not going to accept a Russian military victory that erases the principles of national self-determination.

At the crucial gathering in Munich, Johnson warned of a protracted battle after any invasion that Russia could not contain.

He said: “A lightning war would be followed by a long and hideous period of reprisals and revenge and insurgency, and Russian parents would mourn the loss of young Russian soldiers, who in their way are every bit as innocent as the Ukrainians now bracing themselves for attack.

“If Ukraine is overrun by brute force, I fail to see how a country encompassing nearly a quarter of a million square miles – the biggest nation in Europe apart from Russia itself – could then be held down and subjugated for ever.”

It came as Zelenskiy demanded greater support from the west in the face of Russian aggression and the immediate imposition of tough sanctions on Russia, which leaders have vowed to impose should an invasion take place.

Ukraine’s military said two of its soldiers had been killed and four injured in enemy shelling on Saturday. It said there were 70 ceasefire violations as of 5pm local time. Civilians living close to the frontline with separatist-controlled territory experienced another day of intense shelling and bombardment.

Ukraine’s foreign ministry said “armed Russian formations” had unleashed “provocative firing” all across the 155-mile (250km) frontline in the east of the country.

Meanwhile, there was growing suspicion that Russia was behind a series of seemingly coordinated “false flag” attacks, designed to give Vladimir Putin a pretext for a possible invasion.

They included a car bomb on Friday evening outside the administration building in separatist-run Donetsk, an “attack” on a water station and a shell that landed just over the border in Russia’s Rostov region.

In Stanytsia Luhanska, a Ukrainian-controlled town on the outskirts of Luhansk, one of the Russia-backed separatist capitals, repeated thuds of incoming fire were audible on Saturday afternoon. Ukrainian officials in the town said there had been frequent bursts of incoming fire over the past few days.

The Ukrainian military took a group of journalists into Stanytsia Luhanska by helicopter and armoured vehicles on Saturday to help dispel what it said was a false Russian narrative that the Ukrainian army has been behind the recent rise in violence.

Ukraine’s military intelligence service said on Saturday the Kremlin was planning further destabilising operations, which could even see civilians killed, with an attack blamed on Kyiv.

The Ukrainian capital was also a possible target, it indicated. The service said that leaflets circulating in the Donetsk and Luhansk rebel republics, purporting to come from the Ukrainian army, were fakes. The flyers claimed Ukraine was preparing to attack.

Ukraine's pro-western government said it was committed to dialogue and had no intention of launching an attack, or carrying out acts of sabotage in the Donbas region. Meanwhile, Nato said it was moving its personnel from Kyiv to the western city of Lviv. The British embassy relocated to Lviv on Saturday.

Until now, public discussion has been limited to the massive economic sanctions the west will impose on the Russian economy – and Putin's circle. Steps have also been taken to protect Nato's eastern flank, principally in Poland, Romania and the Baltics.

Joe Biden has ruled out American troops being sent to Ukraine since the US has no legal obligation to help Ukraine that extends to providing military assistance.

However, in his speech to the Munich security conference, Johnson made it clear that the west must stand by Ukraine by ensuring Russia was ultimately repelled.

"If dialogue fails and if Russia chooses to use violence against an innocent and peaceful population in Ukraine, and to disregard the norms of civilised behaviour between states, and to disregard the charter of the United Nations, then we at this conference should be in no doubt that it is in our collective interest that Russia should ultimately fail and be seen to fail," he said.

He presaged the possibility of further military help when he added: "We have to steel ourselves for the possibility of a protracted crisis, with Russia maintaining the pressure and searching for weaknesses over an extended period, and we must together refuse to be worn down."

The degree of military assistance and the extent to which it is overt is still under discussion. Its scope in part depends on events on the ground. In public, Johnson has so far only said it is possible arms would be supplied, adding he would not rule it out. The west would not wish to be seen to be fomenting a futile and bloody resistance that was risking a wider conflict between Nato and Russia.

In the US, the Biden administration has approved about \$650m (£480m) of military equipment to Kyiv in the past year, and more recently, it authorised a \$200m package to Ukraine that included Javelin anti-tank missiles, other anti-armour systems, grenade launchers and munitions. The US has also allowed the Baltic states to send weapons, including anti-aircraft missiles.

Last night, Johnson said that Russia's plans were "in motion", but that Putin could still pull back and call off his military operations.

"In the course of the next few days if there is a violent kinetic phase of this in Ukraine, that is the moment when the west, when Nato, will be truly tested," he said. "If there's still a path for diplomacy, for negotiation, then let's go down it."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	<b>02/20 Belarus: Russia troops remain indefinitely</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/20/russian-troops-will-remain-indefinitely-says-belarus-as-fears-rise-of-ukraine-invasion">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/20/russian-troops-will-remain-indefinitely-says-belarus-as-fears-rise-of-ukraine-invasion</a>
GIST	<p>Russian troops <a href="#">sent to Belarus for military exercises</a> will remain in the country indefinitely, Belarus's defence ministry has said, in a decision that will further fuel concerns Moscow is planning an imminent Ukraine invasion.</p> <p>Belarus's defence minister, Gen Viktor Khrenin, said Russian soldiers would stay after large-scale joint drills were completed on Sunday. He said the move was necessary because of the "escalation of the situation" in the Donbas, in the east of Ukraine.</p>

The Kremlin had promised to remove its forces from Belarus once the 10-day exercise, which began on 10 February, ended. It has deployed what the Nato secretary general, Jens Stoltenberg, said was the [largest concentration of soldiers and modern weapons](#) in Belarus since the cold war.

They include 30,000 combat troops, elite Spetsnaz units, Su-35 fighter jets and S-400 missile defence systems. Russian forces are stationed close to the Belarus border and within striking defences of Kyiv 160 miles away. The US and UK have warned Moscow is planning to attack the Ukrainian capital.

“In connection with the increase in military activity near the external borders of the Union State and the escalation of the situation in the Donbas, the Presidents of the Republic of Belarus and the Russian Federation decided to continue the joint inspection of response forces,” the statement by Belarus’s ministry of defence said.

As recently as Wednesday Belarus’s foreign minister, Vladimir Makei, said “not a single” Russian soldier would remain in the country after the massive joint drills – a promise echoed by Russia’s foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov.

Vladimir Putin’s spokesperson, Dmitry Peskov, repeated his claim on Sunday that Russia had no plans to launch a military offensive. “We urge you to ask yourself the question: what is the point of Russia attacking anyone?,” Peskov told the state-run Rossia 1 TV.

Peskov added that Russia had “never attacked anyone throughout its history”. But he warned that “any spark, unplanned incident or minor planned provocation” in the Donbas region might lead to what he called “irreparable consequences”.

The troop announcement follows what Ukraine’s government says is a coordinated spike in violence in the east of the country, where Ukrainian soldiers and pro-Russian separatists face off across a 260-mile (421km) frontline. Since Thursday, Ukrainian positions have come under intense bombardment.

Ukraine’s joint forces command said that by 1pm local time on Sunday 27 artillery strikes had been launched against 10 Ukrainian-controlled villages and towns. It blamed the “provocative shelling” on Russia’s armed forces. Two Ukrainian soldiers have been killed since Saturday and five wounded, it added.

Separatists from the Luhansk peoples republic (LPR) have claimed they are under Ukrainian attack. On Sunday, they said two civilians had been killed near the village of Pionerskoye. “Unfortunately, as a result of the aggression of the Kiev militants, two civilians died and five residential buildings were destroyed,” the LPR said.

Ukraine’s operational command dismissed the report as “an absolute fake” and said troops had been given orders to refrain from any “active action”. “We realise that the Russians are now looking for any excuse to invade,” it said, adding that it was closing several crossing points with rebel territory because of hostile fire.

The Biden administration, Boris Johnson, among others, have said they believe Russia is behind a series of recent “false flag” events, designed to give Moscow a pretext to invade. They include a car bomb on Friday outside the separatist administration building in Donetsk, an “attack” on a water plant and a “shell” that landed across the border in Russia’s Rostov region.

The situation in Kyiv and other Ukrainian cities remained calm on Sunday. Demonstrators took to the streets of the Black Sea port city of Odessa, waving blue and yellow Ukrainian flags. They shouted slogans including “Glory to Ukraine” and “Putin is a prick”.

Meanwhile, the Dutch foreign ministry said it was moving its embassy from Kyiv to the western city of Lviv. “Due to security reasons, we have decided today to move the activities of the embassy to Lviv,” it said in a statement.

The US and UK have already moved their missions to Lviv, with other European countries following suit. The French ambassador in Kyiv said on Saturday he was staying put.

The political analyst Artyom Shraibman said the decision to keep Russian troops in Belarus was expected. He described Belarus’s president, Alexander Lukashenko, as “completely dependent on what Putin wants. “Lukashenko is forced to dance to Putin’s tune,” he said.

He added: “Lukashenko won’t be happy that he is being used, but he will hope that Belarus might get something in return from Russia. Potentially a new credit or new weapons deal. The Belarusian leader doesn’t have any real allies left.

“This shows that Lukashenko is very vulnerable at the moment, he has to play along with Putin’s bigger games.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	02/19 FDA eyes second Covid-19 booster shot
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/fda-eyes-second-covid-19-booster-shot-11645282800?mod=hp_trending_now_article_pos4">https://www.wsj.com/articles/fda-eyes-second-covid-19-booster-shot-11645282800?mod=hp_trending_now_article_pos4</a>
GIST	<p>U.S. health regulators are looking at potentially authorizing a fourth dose of <a href="#">a Covid-19 vaccine</a> in the fall, according to people familiar with the matter.</p> <p>The planning is still in early stages, and authorization would depend on ongoing studies establishing that a fourth dose would shore up people’s molecular defenses that waned after <a href="#">their first booster</a> and reduce their risk of <a href="#">symptomatic and severe disease</a>, the people said.</p> <p>The Food and Drug Administration, however, has begun reviewing data so it can make a decision, the people said.</p> <p>The thinking among regulators is that the agency would look at authorizing a second booster dose of the messenger RNA vaccines from <a href="#">Pfizer</a> Inc. and partner <a href="#">BioNTech SE</a> and from <a href="#">Moderna</a> Inc., one of the people said.</p> <p>Among the issues that need to be resolved, the person said, are whether the second booster should be authorized for all adults or particular age groups, and whether it should target the Omicron variant or be formulated differently. Whether the fourth booster could ultimately be the start of an annual Covid-19 vaccination is also under consideration.</p> <p>No decision is final, and it could be necessary to make booster shots available earlier if a dangerous, elusive variant appears, the person said.</p> <p>Offering a second booster dose, one of the people said, may make sense in the fall because many people get their annual flu shots then and so might be more receptive to getting vaccinations.</p> <p>Potential obstacles to the effort are that many people are fatigued with vaccinations after getting initial doses and that others are hesitant to get the shots. About 65% of the U.S. population is fully vaccinated, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, meaning they have gotten two doses of the vaccine from either Moderna or Pfizer/BioNTech, or one dose of <a href="#">Johnson &amp; Johnson</a>’s shot. About 43% of fully vaccinated people have gotten a booster shot.</p> <p>Yet a higher percentage of older people and others at higher risk of infection have gotten boosted, and many of them could be eager to get a fourth dose.</p>



After research found that Covid-19 vaccines' protection sags over time, health authorities began urging people [to get a first extra dose](#). Studies have shown [the booster can strengthen immune defenses](#) that have weakened months after initial vaccination.

The Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines are two doses, taken a few weeks apart. The [CDC recommends third doses](#) of the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna at least five months after the second dose. Researchers have been debating whether a fourth dose is needed, especially to fight highly transmissible variants such as Omicron or new ones that emerge.

Some research suggests that protection from mRNA vaccines after a third dose remains strong overall, but risk of hospitalization increases further out from the dose. In the month after the Omicron variant became dominant in the U.S. around Dec. 20, protection against hospitalization fell from 91% within two months of receiving a third shot to 78% after four months, according to [a recent study from the CDC](#).

In January, Israel's health ministry published an initial study saying a fourth shot provided threefold protection against serious illness and twofold protection against infection compared with people who were four months after their third shot. Other Israeli researchers who did a separate study cast doubt on whether a fourth shot added effective protection against Omicron.

The Israeli government [has cleared use of four doses](#) in certain groups of people, including those who are at least 60 years old, the immunocompromised and healthcare workers.

A fourth booster shot of either the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine could start an annual booster shot campaign, one of the people familiar with the FDA's planning said.

Some drugmakers already have been expecting booster shots could become a yearly effort. Pfizer CEO Albert Bourla said in a recent interview that the goal shouldn't be to simply give everyone another dose every few months, although some high-risk people like the immunocompromised or the elderly may need shots every six months.

He said the expectation has been, and remains, that most people, after receiving a three-dose primary series, would need annual shots. Yet Omicron may change thinking, he said, because it is the first variant in which "you see for the first time a significant evasion of protection."

Pfizer is testing an Omicron-targeting vaccine. An additional dose of such a shot may generate enough protection so that most of the population only needs annual Covid-19 inoculations, Dr. Bourla said.

Among the various parts of Pfizer's study of the Omicron-targeting vaccine that began last month is one in which people will receive fourth doses of either the current shot [or the Omicron one](#).

Moderna in January [started testing an Omicron-specific booster shot](#) in a clinical trial that includes people who have previously received three doses of the original vaccine.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	<b>02/19 Toxic culture DIA defense attaché system?</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/workplace-harassment-undermines-pentagon-spying-in-europe-documents-say-11645272000?mod=hp_lead_pos4">https://www.wsj.com/articles/workplace-harassment-undermines-pentagon-spying-in-europe-documents-say-11645272000?mod=hp_lead_pos4</a>
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON—Military diplomats operating in Europe are subject to what they describe as toxic workplace conditions that include colleagues spying on each other, undermining one another by exposing potentially derogatory information, and harassment of female colleagues.</p> <p>The allegations about life inside an arm of the Defense Intelligence Agency are detailed in some 30 witness statements and complaints to the inspector general provided to lawmakers. These allegations,</p>

which were shared with the House and Senate intelligence committees, and a workplace climate survey that described widespread problems inside the service, were reviewed by The Wall Street Journal.

The statements were collected by a recently retired decorated pilot and combat veteran who describes himself as a whistleblower in the DIA's defense attaché system, which liaises with foreign militaries overseas. A whistleblower inside the intelligence community is someone who reports what they believe to be wrongdoing to an authorized recipient, such as Congress or the inspector general, and is supposed to be protected from retaliation for coming forward with such complaints.

"The toxic culture within DIA is a threat to national security," Ryan Sweazey, who retired as an Air Force lieutenant colonel earlier this month, said. Lt. Col. Sweazey said the agency's actions are "alienating and disenfranchising our intelligence personnel while disrupting and degrading operations."

Lt. Col. Sweazey said he became a target for reprisals after raising concerns about the workplace through the chain of command. He filed complaints with the DIA inspector general and after those investigations appeared to stall, gathered witness statements himself and submitted them to lawmakers last summer.

The DIA inspector general has been the target of [previous allegations](#) by employees who said the office's leadership was watering down reports about problems inside the agency and impeding investigations into complaints. A council of inspectors general reviewed those complaints and closed the case without citing issues with the DIA inspector general's role or performance, a defense official said.

The DIA said in a statement that it has "zero tolerance" for violations of professional standards. It didn't respond to detailed questions about the allegations made by Lt. Col. Sweazey and others.

"The DIA Inspector General Office maintains a long-established record of providing independent and effective oversight and exercising rigorous investigative practices over Federal Government programs and operations in support of the Defense Intelligence Agency," the agency said.

The statements Lt. Col. Sweazey provided to Congress include allegations that a colleague at the Defense Attaché Office in Rome was secretly reporting negative information about the performance of co-workers to superiors. The practice turned managers in Western Europe against their subordinates, creating a hostile atmosphere in the office and disrupting their efforts to gather intelligence, according to Lt. Col. Sweazey and others whose statements were submitted to Congress.

The Defense Attaché Service has a presence in some 140 countries and falls under the leadership of the DIA, the Pentagon's intelligence arm. Its personnel are known as overt intelligence collectors, meaning they operate in the open rather than under cover. They observe military exercises and track arms sales as well as military facilities. Defense attaché positions have traditionally been seen as prestigious assignments representing the Pentagon overseas.

In their statements, the witnesses said toxic workplace conditions impeded their efforts to carry out their duties.

"As a defense attaché at a U.S. Embassy in a foreign country, I should not have to spend a large portion of my time looking over my shoulder for someone nefarious from DIA," a Navy officer wrote in one of the witness statements submitted to Congress. "There are plenty of other foreign threats for me to worry about."

He also wrote that a manager urged him to stay away from colleagues who were perceived to be troublemakers and if needed, report back to her.

In another witness statement, a different Navy officer said that a private medical condition was exposed and used against him.

“There is little doubt as to the impact on national security,” the officer wrote to Congress last June. “Members of the attaché service cannot perform their duties for fear of being arbitrarily recalled, ridiculed for effort or threatened with poor performance evaluations.”

That officer said in an interview that he was pulled from his European attaché assignment early and experienced retaliation for bucking a culture that inhibits taking initiative. He was discouraged, for example, from writing too many intelligence reports.

“There was friction between my enthusiasm and some other people’s understanding of their roles and responsibilities,” the former officer said.

He said he filed an inspector general complaint two years ago. This month, the DIA Inspector General informed him that it had concluded there was insufficient evidence that he was a victim of reprisal, according to a copy of the letter reviewed by the Journal.

A Defense Attaché Service workforce survey dated September 2020 and reviewed by the Journal, found that almost half of 79 respondents said they had witnessed hostile behavior in the workplace, including intimidation, harassment and bullying. Some 30% of respondents said they had directly experienced racial, gender or other forms of discrimination.

The DIA didn’t respond to questions about the survey.

“The Defense Intelligence Agency is a professional foreign-intelligence organization with a highly trained workforce, including dedicated men and women of the armed forces. The agency has zero tolerance for willful violations of professional standards,” the agency said in a statement. “We would respond as appropriate to any credible allegations of misconduct, abuse, or activities that conflict with our core values.”

Defense Attaché Service Director Michael Bochna emailed his staff in November 2020 after the survey was completed, promising to address the concerns, according to a copy of the email shared with lawmakers.

“One of the big messages that came from the survey and that we have seen manifesting itself: employees feel worn out, overworked and underappreciated,” he wrote, promising that leadership was taking notice. He also said the results offer “an opportunity to inform leadership on a number of ways we can involve, improve and restore the workforce going forward.”

Mr. Bochna declined to comment.

Both the House and Senate intelligence committees are aware of concerns about working conditions in the attaché service and are examining them, committee officials said. In its version of the annual intelligence authorization bill, the House committee directed DIA to provide it with summaries of future workforce climate surveys, as well as data about the number of employees seeking help with a perceived hostile work environment.

The allegations outlined in witness statements to Congress ranged from retaliation to sexual harassment.

A U.S. Army lieutenant colonel wrote in a witness statement provided to lawmakers about his experience at the Joint Military Attaché School, which trains attachés, in 2016. After he criticized certain aspects of the course, faculty members falsely accused his wife of operating a political blog, he said, in a bid to render him ineligible for service overseas.

“I was targeted for comments made in a supposedly anonymous survey,” he wrote in the statement. “These allegations were patently false (my wife ran a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization chartered to help vulnerable women).”

	<p>Among the witness statements was one provided anonymously to lawmakers through Lt. Col. Sweazey alleging that faculty at the school turned a blind eye to harassment, including an instructor who poked a female U.S. Air Force pilot in the chest. Lt. Col. Sweazey also described an end-of-course video that included a photo montage of pictures taken surreptitiously of the students during training showing them in various stages of undress and set to the 1991 dance hit “I’m Too Sexy.”</p> <p>Lt Col. Sweazey said he became the victim of two reprisals while serving as an assistant defense attaché at the U.S. Embassy in Rome after raising concerns about the workplace. These included receiving a poor performance review and being removed from consideration for an assignment in Germany.</p> <p>He filed a complaint with the DIA inspector detailing eight instances of waste, reprisals and other abuses of authority in August 2020. After hearing nothing for a year, he approached the DIA director and lawmakers on the House and Senate intelligence committees.</p> <p>Toxicity in the workplace is “a cancer that directly threatens the mission and national security,” he wrote in a July 2021 email to Army Lt. Gen. Scott Berrier, the head of the Defense Intelligence Agency.</p> <p>Gen. Berrier didn’t respond to the email or to a Journal request for comment.</p> <p>The inspector general closed the investigation into Lt. Col. Sweazey’s complaints in November 2021 after 444 days, concluding that his allegations were unsubstantiated. In its response, the inspector general said that negative performance reviews or canceled assignments didn’t constitute clear evidence of a reprisal.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>02/20 Growing cohort never worked from office</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/remote-lets-generation-z-work-without-any-office-will-matter-11645220523?mod=hp_lead_pos6">https://www.wsj.com/articles/remote-lets-generation-z-work-without-any-office-will-matter-11645220523?mod=hp_lead_pos6</a>
GIST	<p>Shannon Chin went from working and learning remotely in college to working two jobs remotely while staying with family in the Toronto area. She didn’t meet her colleagues face to face at one of those jobs, in user experience, until December—nearly a year and a half after signing on. In fact, she hadn’t seen their faces at all</p> <p>“We had had cameras off for meetings, so I didn’t even know what they looked like,” the 22-year-old says.</p> <p>As for her colleagues at her other job, in social media: “I’ve never met anyone before. Not a single person,” she says.</p> <p>A growing cohort of young employees have never worked from an office. They graduated during the pandemic or landed jobs just as offices began to shut down. And many of them—especially Generation Z—imagine they may never work in an office, as remote work becomes the default for many businesses.</p> <p>In general, they are OK with that: Many of them like being remote and want to be able to work that way. But there are drawbacks. Surveys show that young remote workers also feel <a href="#">unmoored and anxious</a>. And researchers argue that the young workers may harm their personal and professional lives in the future by missing office work and the traditional experiences that prior generations took for granted: learning from older colleagues, schmoozing with bosses, settling into the rhythms of an office workday—or even just being face to face with others. It is new territory, and the experience is likely to shape these workers in lasting ways.</p> <p><b>Born to screens</b></p> <p>Members of Gen Z—those born roughly beginning in 1997—are expected to account for nearly a third of the U.S. civilian labor force by 2030, according to projections from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. And, for the most part, these digital natives don’t want to go into the office full time. Among Gen Zers surveyed in the fall of 2020, several months into the Covid-19 pandemic, 69% said they would like to work</p>

remotely at least half the time, according to professors Santor Nishizaki and James DellaNeve, who are writing a book about Gen Z and the future workforce.

Paradoxically, the professors' research also revealed that nearly half of respondents reported an increase of anxiety and depression ascribed to remote work.

Working from home can make anyone [lonely and anxious](#), but experts say these effects are more pronounced for Gen Zers—who have spent a lot of time on screens from the start. “This is the cohort with the least amount of person-to-person interaction while growing up,” says Dr. Nishizaki, adjunct professor at California State University, Los Angeles. “There is a link there between depression and anxiety and how we constantly compare ourselves to other people, and then we are only seeing our best selves online and on social media.”

Compounding the problem, young adulthood, from ages 18 to 29, is a particularly lonely time of life for many, with or without screens, says Jeffrey Arnett, a professor of psychology at Clark University.

It is “the time when people spend the most time alone until you get to your 70s,” says Dr. Arnett. “You may not have a romantic partner, you may not see your parents so much anymore because you probably don't live at home, and you change residences so much that that complicates having stable friendships.”

Working in an office, Dr. Arnett says, allows relationships with colleagues, from friendships to mentorships, to form more naturally.

That means young remote workers may miss out not only on professional relationships but also on friends and potential romantic partners, says Johnny C. Taylor Jr., president and chief executive of the Society for Human Resource Management.

“There's something that happens when a group of us, say, ‘Hey, after work on Friday, we're all going to X bar,’ and you go with a group, and there's that dynamic,” he says.

For recent college graduate Elizabeth Mooneyham, 21, loneliness can creep in while she works from home in a three-bedroom trailer near the campus of her alma mater, Auburn University. She lives by herself about an hour's drive away from her office at the Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries in Montgomery.

“I haven't been able to form relationships with the people I'm working with as easily,” she says. “I can become isolated really quickly if I let myself.”

### **Long-term harm**

The potential problems aren't just personal ones, of course. Working remotely presents Gen Z with significant challenges on the job.

Young workers often express concerns about the ability to build a professional network, says Mr. Taylor. This is a problem for any remote worker—but a bigger one for younger people who haven't established themselves professionally.

“One day, one of their classmates is going to be the CEO of something or the board member of some company, and you won't have that real authentic relationship with him or her,” says Mr. Taylor.

Remote work may also lead to career crises. Because young millennial and Gen Z workers generally have less experience and less power at work than other age groups, they often worry about whether they are on the right track. They are more likely to be affected by feeling out of the loop, say Drs. Nishizaki and DellaNeve.

Without consistent feedback, they can more easily start to wonder things like, “ ‘Is my boss mad at me? Am I doing OK?’ ” says Dr. Nishizaki. They are even more vulnerable to [impostor syndrome](#), a

psychological phenomenon that makes people doubt their hard-won success or worry about being exposed as a fraud.

“It can just feel like some weird videogame sometimes where it’s all on your computer and none of these people exist,” says Francis Zierer, 27, who works in marketing at a software company in New York. At home, like many young workers who started new jobs remotely during the pandemic, he has experienced a degree of “FOMO,” or [fear of missing out](#).

Mr. Zierer says he often worries about being out of sight, out of mind. “There’s an impostor syndrome kind of thing like, ‘They’re going to let me go because I have no idea what I’m doing.’ ”

The concern young workers share about being forgotten isn’t unfounded, says Mr. Taylor of the Society for Human Resource Management. The organization conducted a survey in 2021 that revealed 42% of supervisors say they sometimes forget about remote workers when assigning tasks.

“If I’m the supervisor and I have a really juicy assignment, I give it to the person who I just passed in the hallway, because this concept of out of sight, out of mind applies in human nature,” says Mr. Taylor. “So you are missing out on some key opportunities to showcase your talent.”

Remote workers also may be more vulnerable to misunderstandings and bad feelings at work, in part because they are not able to form strong relationships or to build on existing relationships with people they have met. “In the absence of those relationships and in the absence of good quality communication, I think there’s a greater tendency for there to be mistrust, and it’s very hard to kind of work through those issues over a messaging platform or even over a telephone call,” says psychologist Grant Brenner, who coaches clients on subjects including the workplace.

### **A transformation**

For some young workers who have rarely, if ever, gone to the office, a visit to the office has given them a glimpse of what they might be missing. Recently, Mr. Zierer had the chance to meet face-to-face with his colleagues at a rented co-working space in Manhattan. Filled with anticipation, he arrived early, took a selfie in the bathroom, settled into a seat in one of the office’s ergonomic chairs and took part in the meeting.

“It was bringing back some of that tactile, collaborative nature of work, like in a kitchen,” he says, recalling his days working at a restaurant. “If I’m writing a blog post, it’s probably better if I’m, like, alone in my home office doing that, but for some of the other things I wish I had the energy of other people.”

But other young workers aren’t sold on the office experience. Despite her loneliness, Ms. Mooneyham appreciates the benefits of working from home, she says, including flexibility to work from anywhere, which allows her to visit her family in northern Alabama more often than she would otherwise be able to. Having spent hours on Zoom during remote learning in college, she is very comfortable with videoconferencing and often has productive check-ins with her supervisor and other team members virtually.

She is considering moving closer to the office so she can more easily build new relationships with colleagues, but can’t envision herself working from an office full time. “For so long, work was, you go into the office and you wear a pencil skirt and high-heeled shoes and pink lipstick and you sit at a desk all day and then you go home, and that doesn’t have to be the definition of work anymore,” says Ms. Mooneyham. “Millennials and Gen Z probably both have more of a work-to-live, not live-to-work mentality.”

### **Necessary strategies**

Tsedal Neeley, a Harvard Business School professor and author of a book on remote work, believes companies should take on the responsibility of engaging their younger employees, especially in remote-work environments.



“Young people who are building their careers and who are less established in their careers are longing for some form of immersion,” she says.

Without a sense of connection and belonging, they are less likely to feel attached to their employers, she says. “They are going to be quick to want to leave if they don’t feel fully connected and if they don’t like the culture they see.” More than half of Americans planned to look for a new job within the year, according to a [Bankrate survey](#) of more than 2,000 workers in July 2021. Among those surveyed, twice as many Gen Z workers as baby boomers and Gen X workers said they were likely to start the search.

The occasional in-person meeting or optional office day can help assuage some employees by creating a space for more direct conversations (including [easier-to-read body language](#)) and fewer awkward Zoom interruptions. Employees that spend most or all of their time working remotely, however, might require some more deliberate help.

Dr. Neeley is particularly impressed by companies with onboarding strategies that allow new remote employees to spend their first month in scheduled meetings, learning events and completing collaborative tasks. “If you’re an organization, you’d better put together a program that ensures people know how to lead in this environment as part of the retention strategy,” she says.

Ms. Chin, the remote worker with two jobs, says she sometimes struggles to get her points across on video calls, opting to stay quiet rather than risk interrupting someone else, and often works from 10 a.m. to 2 a.m. because of the blurred line between her work life and home life. Still, she appreciates the moments she gets to spend with her family and the time she gets back from scrapping her commute. Ms. Chin has high hopes for the future of work that her generation is helping to usher in.

“Giving that choice to employees on whether they want to come into work or not, is very beneficial,” she says. “Sometimes people just aren’t feeling it and they just want to stay at home and do their work, which is fine, as long as the work is done.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	02/19 Russia proxies in Ukraine: arms call-up
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/breakaway-regions-in-ukraine-issue-call-up-orders-as-russia-tests-missiles-11645277438?mod=hp_lead_pos5">https://www.wsj.com/articles/breakaway-regions-in-ukraine-issue-call-up-orders-as-russia-tests-missiles-11645277438?mod=hp_lead_pos5</a>
GIST	<p>The Russian-led breakaway regions of eastern Ukraine mobilized able-bodied men against what they said was an imminent attack by Kyiv, as <a href="#">shelling across the front line intensified</a>, killing two Ukrainian soldiers.</p> <p>Kyiv dismissed the call-up and <a href="#">moves to evacuate civilian residents</a> of Russian-held Donetsk and Luhansk areas to Russia as a provocation. The escalation followed Western warnings that Moscow is about to launch an all-out invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>“It’s a fake mobilization in response to a fake threat,” said Ukrainian Interior Minister Denys Monastyrskiy, who came under shelling near the front line on Saturday. “What they are trying to do is to create panic and fear, also on our side and among our people.”</p> <p>Russian-installed authorities in Donetsk and Luhansk on Friday night instructed the areas’ women, children and elderly to leave for Russia, organizing convoys of buses. On Saturday, Denis Pushilin, head of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People’s Republic, ordered the general mobilization of men between 18 and 55 years old, including reservists, telling them to report to enlistment offices. Men of that age were banned from leaving the enclave.</p> <p>“I appeal to all the men of the Republic, who are able to hold weapons in their hands, to stand up for their families, their children, wives, mothers,” Mr. Pushilin said in a televised address. Russian-installed authorities in Luhansk announced a similar decision.</p>



Ukraine denies it has any plans to recapture by force the parts of Donetsk and Luhansk that Russian-backed forces seized in 2014. President Biden has said that he expected his Russian counterpart, [Vladimir Putin](#), to invade Ukraine in the coming days, [with targets including the Ukrainian capital](#).

Some two million people live in the Russian-controlled parts of Donetsk and Luhansk, and Russian authorities said they are bracing for hundreds of thousands of refugees. Moscow promised each of these refugees accommodation and a \$130 cash bonus.

Kyiv has said that while the security situation is deteriorating, it doesn't share Washington's apocalyptic predictions. Speaking Saturday at the Munich Security Conference, where he received a standing ovation, President Volodymyr Zelensky said Ukraine isn't living in a delusion but continues to carry on in the face of an existential threat.

"Just putting ourselves in coffins and waiting for foreign soldiers to come in is not something we are going to do," he said. "But we stand ready to respond to everything."

Until last week shelling and firing incidents along the front line averaged five to six a day, but that number has surged more than 10-fold in the last three days, said Lt. Gen. Oleksandr Pavliuk, the commander of Ukrainian forces in Donbas.

"The enemy artillery is shooting from behind civilians," he said. "And, in accordance with our principles, we do not fire back at civilians."

Washington and Kyiv have warned that Moscow is looking to use fighting in Donetsk and Luhansk, [where roughly 14,000 people have died](#) since Russia fomented an uprising in 2014, as a pretext for a broader military operation against Ukraine. Russian officials said Saturday that two artillery shells fell inside Russia near the border, causing no damage. Kyiv denied its forces fired in that direction.

Mr. Monastyrskiy, citing Ukrainian intelligence, said [Russian mercenaries from the Wagner group](#) have arrived in Donetsk and Luhansk with orders to blow up critical infrastructure and pin the blame on Kyiv. The claim couldn't be independently confirmed.

Shelling could be heard throughout Saturday in Stanytsia Luhanska, the Ukrainian-controlled town where the only crossing point between Russian-held areas and Ukrainian parts of Donbas—as the Donetsk and Luhansk regions are collectively known—operates daily.

So far, the crossing has remained open, with more than 840 people, mostly women and children, traversing the front line to enter Ukrainian-controlled areas on Saturday, according to Ukrainian border officials. Some 50 fighting-age men were prevented by Russian-installed officials from leaving, they said.

"Of course, some of the people who cross this way are nervous and afraid, but we don't see any panic so far," said the Ukrainian governor of Luhansk region, Serhii Haidai, who was visiting the town. He said Russian authorities have started amassing heavy weapons on the other side of the front line.

Ukrainian authorities were preparing plans for evacuating civilians from towns within Russian artillery range, like Stanytsia Luhanska, should violence continue to escalate. Schools in those areas will operate remotely after shelling hit a kindergarten in Stanytsia Luhanska and an elementary school in a nearby town on Thursday, Mr. Haidai said. Ukraine and the U.S. blamed Russia for the shelling, which injured three staff members. None of the 20 kindergarten children in the building at the time were hurt when an artillery round punched through the brick wall of a recreation room.

Speaking next to a crater caused by one of the shells in the courtyard of the Stanytsia Luhanska kindergarten, Iryna Vereshchuk, Ukraine's deputy prime minister and minister for the reintegration of occupied territories, said Moscow sought to create panic in Russian-held parts of Donetsk and Luhansk by spreading false plans of an alleged Ukrainian offensive and staging explosions there.

“What they need is fear,” she said.

Ms. Vereshchuk added that Kyiv doesn’t expect Russia to openly invade Ukraine imminently. “Our intelligence doesn’t confirm this. Yes, there are steps toward a certain escalation—you can hear shelling with your own ears—but that doesn’t mean that a full-scale invasion is being prepared. What our intelligence does confirm is that Russia is seeking to create provocations.”

Ukraine, she said, had no intention of retaking Russian-controlled areas by force. “We cannot start shooting peaceful residents,” she said.

Col. Oleksii Vukolov, deputy commander of the Ukrainian military’s Northern Command in Donbas, said the situation along the front line was tense but stable on Saturday.

“We observe the agreements and do not respond to fire. They are trying to provoke us to shoot back, so that they could say that the temporarily occupied areas are being assaulted,” Col. Vukolov said. “Our children are behind our backs, and we must defend them so they can live on this land in peace.”

According to U.S. estimates, as many as 190,000 Russian troops have deployed around Ukraine, ready to strike. Speaking at the conference in Munich, Vice President Kamala Harris—who met with Mr. Zelensky there—said Russia [was following a playbook of aggression](#) that the West has seen before, in which it will “create false pretext for invasion and it will amass troops and firepower in plain sight.”

In an emotional speech, Mr. Zelensky pointed out that Ukraine gave up its nuclear weapons after the fall of the Soviet Union in return for security assurances from the U.S., U.K. and Russia. “Now, we have neither weapons, nor security, and we lost a part of our territory that is larger than Switzerland, Netherlands or Belgium.”

Mr. Zelensky questioned U.S. intelligence reports that a Russian invasion was imminent, but said Ukrainians would defend themselves with or without Western support. “We cannot remain passive,” he said. “We cannot say on the daily basis that war will happen tomorrow...How can you live in this state, when on a daily basis you are being told that tomorrow, the war will happen; tomorrow the advance will happen?”

Russian military exercises that involve some 30,000 troops in Belarus are slated to end on Sunday. Russia has repeatedly said it intends to pull back these troops. Military experts say this deadline puts pressure on Mr. Putin, who must decide whether to send troops back to their bases or use them in an offensive operation against Ukraine.

The Ukrainian army has deployed and is on high alert, but until now hasn’t mobilized civilians, as pro-Kremlin authorities in Donbas have done. Ukrainian officials say that the shelling, which has increased all along the front lines as tensions with Moscow have worsened, is mostly exploratory, with Russian-backed forces seeking to provoke counterstrikes by Ukrainian units.

On Saturday, Ukrainian defense officials said Russian-led fighters in Donbas distributed phony leaflets, allegedly from the Ukrainian military, to residents warning that Ukrainian forces would soon launch an attack on their territory.

In the Ukrainian-controlled city of Kramatorsk, less than an hour’s drive from the front line, many residents say they intend to stay whatever happens. Valentyna Skrybalo, 62, marched with a blue-and-yellow Ukrainian flag in central Kramatorsk in a rally commemorating the eighth anniversary of the street fighting in Kyiv that ousted a pro-Russian president in 2014.

“Putin has put his tanks and armor and soldiers on our border,” she said. “I have no plans to leave, this is exactly where I should be.”

	<p>Anastasia Shlepchenko, 32, said she was in Kyiv studying in 2014 but has since returned to be closer to her family. If a military invasion begins, she said she plans to stay no matter what happens. She said she respects Russians but pities their inability to choose their own political future under Mr. Putin's rule.</p> <p>"Ukraine is deciding its own future. That's what all this is about, Ukraine deciding how it wants to live," she said.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>02/18 Virus deaths modest decline; surge wanes</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.usnews.com/news/health-news/articles/2022-02-18/u-s-daily-coronavirus-deaths-show-modest-decline-as-omicron-surge-wanes">https://www.usnews.com/news/health-news/articles/2022-02-18/u-s-daily-coronavirus-deaths-show-modest-decline-as-omicron-surge-wanes</a>
GIST	<p>Average daily deaths in the U.S. from the <a href="#">coronavirus</a> are starting to decline, prompting cautious hope that the deadliest part of the latest wave fueled by the highly transmissible omicron variant is over.</p> <p>Still, the number remains elevated. More than 2,000 people per day are dying from the coronavirus on average, according to <a href="#">data</a> from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.</p> <p>But it's a decrease from early February, when more than 2,500 deaths were being reported on average each day. Deaths tend to lag behind declining infections.</p> <p>The U.S. is averaging over 120,000 new coronavirus cases each day. It's a far drop from its peak in mid-January of over 800,000.</p> <p>"Omicron cases are declining, and we are all cautiously optimistic about the trajectory we are on," CDC Director Rochelle Walensky said at a press briefing this week. "Things are moving in the right direction, but we want to remain vigilant to do all we can so that this trajectory continues."</p> <p>Walensky stressed that hospitalization rates and hospital capacity will be important COVID-19 metrics to monitor going forward. She said the agency would "<a href="#">soon</a>" put out new, "relevant" guidance.</p> <p>"We are assessing the most important factors based on where we are in the pandemic, and we'll soon put guidance in place that is relevant and encourages prevention measures when they are most needed to protect public health and our hospitals," Walensky said.</p> <p>The move comes after several – <a href="#">mostly Democratic</a> – states have made plans to drop their mask mandates, citing declining cases and hospitalizations.</p> <p>While <a href="#">pressure grows</a> for the CDC to help states chart a path into a "new phase" of COVID-19, some are going at it alone. California on Thursday <a href="#">announced</a> what appears to be the first state COVID-19 response plan intended to guide a shift toward living with the coronavirus.</p> <p>"We move out of the pandemic phase, and we move into a phase which should allow confidence that we are not walking away – that we're taking the lessons learned, and we're leaning into the future," California Gov. Gavin Newsom said at a press conference.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>02/19 'Stand w/Ukraine rally' held at Space Needle</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/standwithukraine-rally-held-seattle-tensions-rise-ukraine/FUL7F7GOZZEJHHG5QMHBIMAYKI/">https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/standwithukraine-rally-held-seattle-tensions-rise-ukraine/FUL7F7GOZZEJHHG5QMHBIMAYKI/</a>
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — A protest was held outside the Seattle Center on Saturday, as demonstrators rallied against Russia's ongoing aggression toward Ukraine.</p> <p>The demonstration was organized by the Ukrainian Association of Washington State. Liliya Kovalenko, the organization's president, talked to KIRO 7's Graham Johnson the day before the protest, sharing her concerns regarding a Russian invasion of Ukraine.</p>

“They’re not there only for practicing,” Kovalenko said on Friday. [“They are there for invasion and they are ready.”](#)

Kovalenko and about 100 others gathered by the Space Needle on Saturday. Protestors held signs, listened to speeches, and gathered in an effort to show support for both Ukraine and Seattle’s Ukrainian community.

“In a way, sadly, this isn’t something new. It’s just the scale is completely unprecedented,” Laada Bilaniuk, the daughter of two Ukrainian immigrants, said while attending Saturday’s protest. “There are people there who have ideals in common with American ideals (who) are trying to fight for (the same) rights.”

Several Russian citizens also protested in support of Ukraine, including Maria Paramonova.

“I think everybody’s trying to understand what’s happening,” she said on Saturday.

Paramonova said she’s a Russian refugee and has been living in the United States for about a decade. She was hoping her presence would show local Ukrainians that many Russians do not agree with the country’s aggressive actions.

Mitch Gual, a Russian citizen protesting against Vladimir Putin and Russia’s aggression, said, “Having so many troops at the border, anything can go wrong. Anything can go awry. (Putin) is not controlling the situation as he thinks he is. No sane Russian would support war with any neighboring country, least of all Ukraine.”

Gual also shared similar sentiments with Paramonova and said, “(I’m here) for others to see that there are others just like me.”

Tensions continued to rise on Saturday. [Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called to meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin](#) in the hopes of finding a resolution.

Speaking at a [security conference in Munich](#) on Saturday, Zelenskyy urged members of the U.N Security Council for more security guarantees and actions against Russia. He said “the security architecture of our world is brittle, obsolete” and added that global, united security is “slow and failing us time and time again.”

“They are neither catching up with new threats nor being impacted in overcoming them — just like cough syrup instead of a good COVID vaccine,” Zelenskyy said.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	<b>02/19 Weyerhaeuser return downtown Seattle</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/business/after-delaying-over-crime-concerns-weyerhaeuser-says-workers-will-return-to-downtown-seattle-office/">https://www.seattletimes.com/business/after-delaying-over-crime-concerns-weyerhaeuser-says-workers-will-return-to-downtown-seattle-office/</a>
GIST	<p>Having paused reopening efforts last fall in part because of concerns about street crime in Seattle’s downtown core, Weyerhaeuser will be returning to its Pioneer Square headquarters in April.</p> <p>The timber company told employees this week that it plans to reopen its office more broadly and move to a “hybrid schedule” starting the week of April 18, communications director Karl Wirsing said.</p> <p>The news comes the same week Microsoft and Expedia announced plans to fully reopen their own headquarters, with Redmond-based Microsoft headed back on Feb. 28 and Expedia reopening its Interbay headquarters starting April 4. Like Weyerhaeuser, those companies are also implementing a flexible policy for employees and managers to determine when and how often they work from the office.</p>

After reopening its office on a voluntary basis with a 10% capacity cap, Weyerhaeuser hasn't fully returned to an in-person workforce due to concerns about COVID-19 and public safety around Pioneer Square, where it has been headquartered since 2016.

The company [delayed plans to return to the office last fall](#), saying it wouldn't bring workers back without "significant and sustained improvements in neighborhood safety," according to an email chief administration officer Denise Merle sent employees.

At the time, reports of violent crime in Pioneer Square were up about 14% compared to the same time period the year before, based on data from the Seattle Police Department crime dashboard, but down 17% compared to the same time period in 2019. Reports of property crime were down 26% and 49% from 2020 and 2019, respectively.

Crime remains a problem downtown, with [overall crime in Seattle rising 10%](#) in 2021 over 2020, according to the Seattle Police Department's year end crime report released this month.

Ahead of the April deadline, Weyerhaeuser has set up commuting arrangements for workers to "ensure our people can commute safely," including more off-site parking and shuttles from local transportation hubs, Wirsing said in an email to The Seattle Times on Thursday.

Weyerhaeuser could not be reached for additional comment Friday.

The company, founded in 1900 in Tacoma, has 9,200 employees and manages 11 million acres of timberlands in the U.S. It reported net earnings of \$2.6 billion, or \$3.47 per diluted share, in 2021, according to a January announcement.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	<b>02/19 Bellevue boom echoes around the region</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/seattle-a-bedroom-town-how-the-bellevue-boom-echoes-around-the-region/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/seattle-a-bedroom-town-how-the-bellevue-boom-echoes-around-the-region/</a>
GIST	<p>When I wrote recently that <a href="#">Bellevue had become pricier than Manhattan</a>, I noted that the Eastside city still lagged behind the king of insane and unaffordable real estate, San Francisco. But a local agent suggested it might be only a matter of time.</p> <p>"We expect that last record to fall sometime this summer, with Bellevue claiming the absolute top spot as the most expensive city in America," <a href="#">predicted Cary Porter</a>, an agent for Issaquah-based The Cascade Team.</p> <p>Well that didn't take long.</p> <p>Things are so frothy in Bellevue right now that the median price for all homes and condos surged another \$190,000 since December.</p> <p><a href="#">It's now \$1.56 million</a> — leaving <a href="#">even San Francisco</a> in its glittering dust, according to January data released by brokerage firm Redfin this past week.</p> <p>Among cities with more than 100,000 people, Silicon Valley's Sunnyvale is still No. 1 — at \$1.69 million in January. But Bellevue is closing in fast on that.</p> <p>I'm highlighting this again because what we're witnessing in Bellevue is a once-a-generation shock event. It's not just a money spectacle and something to ogle, though it is definitely that. It also has the potential to reshape the Seattle area's demographics, culture and politics.</p> <p>For example: At Monday's Bellevue City Council meeting, a tech worker named Jason Rock came to tell how even he and his wife, both "affluent, highly paid tech employees," couldn't make it in the thin air of the city's housing market. So they were pushed out to somewhere less rarefied.</p>

“We were effectively priced out of Bellevue,” where he works, he said. “As a result, we purchased a town home in Columbia City, in Seattle. This lack of affordable housing in Bellevue has locked me into a fairly substantial commute.”

You see what’s happening here? Seattle is becoming the new bedroom community for its old bedroom community.

This historical reversal is being driven by huge, sudden price shifts. A year ago, in January 2021, Bellevue’s homes were more expensive than Seattle’s homes, but only by \$165,000 — about 20% more. Now, rocket ship Bellevue costs \$825,000 more — a 113% price premium over Seattle.

It means you can now buy *two* median-priced homes in Seattle for the price of one in Bellevue — and still have a hundred grand left over (enough to buy a new Tesla Model X for your commute to the Eastside).

It wasn’t long ago Seattle was the center of gravity. Now we are a cheap place for New Bellevue to sleep.

Here’s a prediction: This housing gold rush is going to radicalize Bellevue’s formerly bland politics.

In the not-too-distant future, I bet a call familiar to Seattleites will also ring out on the Eastside: tax Amazon.

Did you see that Seattle’s progressive payroll tax on high salaries at big companies [is working?](#) In its first year, it raised \$231 million, \$31 million more than projected. That means the tax hasn’t chased the big companies out of the city, not yet anyway, which is what [so many critics wrongly predicted it would do](#).

More to the point of this column, most of that money is going to pay for desperately needed affordable housing in Seattle.

But Bellevue has a more desperate need for affordable housing. Though it’s now one of the most expensive cities in America, [one-fifth of Bellevue’s households are low income](#) (meaning, according to the city, they make less than \$40,000 a year, or \$57,000 for a family of four).

Where will they continue to live? Houses are out of reach, and the median apartment rent there is nearing \$30,000 per year.

Bellevue did [impose a 0.1% sales tax for housing](#) a year ago to try to address this. It’s a regressive tax, though, which hits lower-income people harder as a slice of their incomes. The bigger problem is that it only raises about \$9 million per year — enough to build about 30 new units of affordable housing annually, in a growing city of 152,000.

So the sales tax both hits the poor and isn’t near enough; meanwhile, tech wealth soars. This is an old debate in Seattle, but mark it: Cries of “tax the rich” will be an inevitable echo to this Bellevue boom.

Unless, that is, everyone simply abandons Bellevue to the rich, which seems possible. This also has me curious: When teachers, artists, carpenters and the like get priced out of a place, they often energize some spillover town. Remember when everyone in Seattle was supposedly moving to Burien, [converting it into a hipster haven?](#)

Maybe Bothell will be Bellevue’s Burien. Or it could be that the next “it” town for those displaced by the tech bomb will be somewhere more unexpected, like, say, Monroe. I could see workaday Monroe, population 18,000, catching fire in Bellevue’s blast zone. New motto: It’s not just a prison anymore.

Bellevue is definitely 2022’s place to watch. It’s about all we can do — nobody can afford to move there anymore.



HEADLINE	<b>02/19 Ministry: Cuba to deepen ties with Russia</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/cuba-deepen-ties-with-russia-ukraine-tensions-mount-2022-02-19/">https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/cuba-deepen-ties-with-russia-ukraine-tensions-mount-2022-02-19/</a>
GIST	<p>HAVANA, Feb 19 (Reuters) - Russia and Cuba will deepen ties and explore collaboration in transportation, energy, industry and banking, Cuba's Foreign Ministry said late on Friday following a visit from Russia's Deputy Prime Minister Yuri Borisov.</p> <p>In a statement, Cuba's communist-run government expressed support for Russia as tensions mount in Ukraine, and accused long-time rival the United States and its allies of targeting Moscow with what it called a "propaganda war" and sanctions.</p> <p>Cuba "reiterates its position against the unilateral and unjust sanctions imposed by the West on the Eurasian country and against the expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization towards the Russian borders."</p> <p>Borisov earlier this week visited Nicaragua and Venezuela, key Russian allies in Latin America, and said Russia would also deepen bilateral ties with both countries.</p> <p>His tour follows visits to Moscow by Latin American leaders - including Argentina's Alberto Fernandez and Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro - for talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin, prompting some analysts to suggest Russia is courting the region as tensions rise over Ukraine.</p> <p>Putin launched exercises by strategic nuclear missile forces on Saturday, as Washington said Russian troops massed near Ukraine's border were "poised to strike".</p> <p>Cuba and Russia have a long history of deep economic and military collaboration since Fidel Castro's 1959 revolution, though in recent decades those ties have faded.</p> <p>Borisov, who met with Cuban Deputy Prime Minister Ricardo Cabrisas, said in Cuba's statement that Russia had ramped up humanitarian aid to Cuba between December 2021 and January 2022. He also noted prior shipments of medical supplies to the island amid the coronavirus pandemic.</p> <p>Russia said in December that escalating tensions over Ukraine could lead to a repeat of the Cuban missile crisis, when the world stood on the brink of nuclear war.</p> <p>That crisis in 1962 was triggered by the stationing of Soviet nuclear missiles on the island and prompted the United States, just 90 miles (145 km) away, to impose a naval blockade on Cuba.</p> <p>Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel discussed coordination of a "strategic partnership" with Putin in January, as tensions began to rise in Ukraine.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>02/18 NATO raises readiness level of troops</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.anews.com.tr/world/2022/02/18/nato-raises-readiness-level-for-tens-of-thousands-of-troops">https://www.anews.com.tr/world/2022/02/18/nato-raises-readiness-level-for-tens-of-thousands-of-troops</a>
GIST	<p><u>NATO</u> has raised the readiness level of tens and thousands of troops amid soaring tensions with <u>Russia</u>, widely believed to be preparing to attack <u>Ukraine</u>.</p> <p>NRF rapid reaction forces are to be able to be deployed within just 7 days, rather than 30, dpa learned from sources close to the alliance.</p> <p>For other units, a "notice-to-move" period of 30 days applies, rather than 45 days, effective immediately.</p> <p>The step seeks to deter Moscow from an attack, and comes as intense diplomatic efforts continue to prevent war from breaking out.</p>



Western leaders adopted strategies from warnings to dialogue with Moscow on Friday, as tens of thousands of troops remained stationed along Ukraine's borders.

White House Deputy National Security Adviser Daleep Singh said Russia would be isolated from global financial markets and lose access to cutting-edge technologies in the event of an attack. "The cost to Russia would be immense," Singh said.

"If Russia invades Ukraine, it will become a pariah to the international community, it will become isolated from global financial markets, and it would be deprived of the most sophisticated technological inputs."

Russia would face the prospect of intense capital outflows, mounting pressure on its currency, surging inflation, higher borrowing costs, economic contraction, and the erosion of its productive capacity, he said, referring to the sanctions package prepared by the US and its partners.

At the same time, Washington is set to continue pursuing a dialogue, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said late on Friday.

She said US Secretary of State Antony Blinken is to meet with his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov once again to discuss the Ukraine conflict on Wednesday.

The US still backs a diplomatic solution to the conflict but it remains unclear whether the Russians are serious about negotiating, Psaki said.

Tensions are soaring as up to 190,000 troops under Russian control surround Ukraine. The build-up began last year but more troops have been stationed in the region as part of exercises being held by Russia and Belarus.

Moscow has repeatedly denied plans to invade but has also demanded binding security guarantees of NATO, including that it will never admit Ukraine.

Meanwhile Moscow-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine urged civilians to flee across the border to Russia to protect themselves from an attack they claimed was imminent by Ukrainian government forces.

"Women, children and elderly people" should first be brought to safety, Denis Pushilin, the head of self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic, said in a video message. The Donetsk region alone was planning to evacuate 700,000 people, according to later information.

Pushilin said he was making an "urgent request" for residents to make a "mass, centralized departure," citing the threat of impending military action by Ukrainian troops.

Shortly afterwards, a senior official's car exploded in front of the government building in Donetsk, local media reported. No one was hurt, and it was unclear what caused the explosion.

The separatists in nearby Luhansk, the other rebel stronghold in Ukraine, also ordered similar measures.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said refugees fleeing a rumoured attack in eastern Ukraine should be given cash payments of 10,000 roubles (about \$130).

Meanwhile Kiev reiterated its denials of any plans to attack the separatists.

Ukraine has no plans to launch an attack on separatist-controlled areas in its east, said the country's top military commander.

"An attack on the Donbass would irreversibly lead to countless victims among the civilian population, which is why such scenarios are not being considered at all," Valerii Zaluzhnyi said, arguing that Kiev seeks a peaceful solution to the problem.

"Don't believe the lies of the occupiers," he said, speaking directly to residents of the affected areas.

Other countries again said that Moscow was imperilling the region's security and issued pleas for calm.

Germany and France have called on Russia to use its influence on pro-Moscow separatists in eastern Ukraine to bring about a de-escalation in the burgeoning conflict.

They see no evidence for the separatists' accusations that a Ukrainian attack may be imminent, said a joint statement by Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock and her French counterpart Jean-Yves Le Drian on Friday evening.

Russia should use its influence over the self-proclaimed republics and call for restraint, they said.

Their calls echoed similar demands for dialogue by German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and French President Emmanuel Macron on Friday.

The French and German foreign ministers also condemned the recent increase in ceasefire violations.

The Ukrainian army alleged Friday morning there had been almost two dozen violations by the rebels of the ceasefire agreed to in 2015 under Franco-German mediation. The claims could not be independently verified.

Western powers have warned for weeks that the region could be on the precipice of war, saying the situation could escalate quickly and dramatically.

Russia has repeatedly denied having any intention of attacking its neighbour. The government condemns US, NATO and European assessments of the situation as distorted and an attempt to whip up anti-Russia "hysteria."

The situation in Ukraine is also in focus at the Munich Security Conference, where no Russian delegates are in attendance for the first time in years.

The Kremlin said instead, President Vladimir Putin would oversee military drills on Saturday involving the launch of ballistic and cruise missiles.

He also plans to join a manoeuvre to check Russia's nuclear arsenal, according to an announcement.

Belarusian ruler Alexander Lukashenko is also taking part, as both hold large-scale manoeuvre in the south of Belarus on Ukraine's border.

Lukashenko and Putin also discussed expanding their cooperation, and condemned the Western sanctions affecting both their countries.

Meanwhile Washington also said that Ukraine could expect further cyber-attacks if Russia were to invade the country.

Moscow was responsible for the recent cyber attacks on several Ukrainian websites, the US government said, referring to the sites of the Defence Ministry and several state-owned banks earlier this week.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	02/18 Deaths pile up Pierce Co. highways; why?
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/article258504323.html">https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/article258504323.html</a>
GIST	Eight people have died on state highways in Pierce County this year. It's a pace that could eclipse the past two years.

In 2020, 28 people died in Pierce and Thurston counties, according to the Washington State Patrol. In 2021, 38 people died — a nearly 36 percent increase.

“This year, if this continues, we’re going to beat that quite a bit,” said WSP spokesperson Robert Reyer on Thursday.

There were five deaths just in the first 16 days of February.

What’s leading to the increase?

While some of this month’s wrecks have similar causes, there is no discernible pattern. But Reyer said he’s noticed a change in drivers’ behavior during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Those common courtesies of using a blinker when moving or merging right in front of somebody, or not tailgating somebody else, or just driving in a respectful manner seem to have kind of gone away,” he said.

Reyer acknowledges he’s not a psychologist and doesn’t know what effect isolation has had on people, but he’s noticed a change. Drivers are going faster and driving more negligently, he said.

“People seem to care less about others and also their own safety,” he said.

#### RECKLESS, NEGLIGENT AND JUST PLAIN RUDE

When the early days of the pandemic cleared freeways it motivated speeders to turn them into personal race courses.

Reyer had noticed more aggressive, negligent and reckless driving even before COVID.

“We definitely noticed that people’s speeds have significantly increased and that their care for the safety of others around them has significantly decreased,” he said. “We have people going at 90 miles an hour, in somewhat heavy traffic”

Combine speed with unsafe lane changing and the violations can quickly add up. Negligent driving alone can be a \$550 fine. Reckless driving? That will get you arrested, he said.

Tacoma drivers have been subjected to a reduced speed limit through the city on I-5 for years as state Department of Transportation contractors work on HOV lane construction. The reduced speed limit makes sense, Reyer said.

“What if a barrel rolls into the road? If you go 50, your braking distance will be much shorter than if you go 60,” he said. Turns signals are ostensibly designed to warn other drivers about your intentions. Reyer has been to more than one accident where two drivers simultaneously merged into the same lane because neither activated their turn signals. “So, neither driver knows what the other guy is going to do and now they hit each other,” he said.

#### DISTRACTED DRIVERS

Beginning in the 1990s, cell phones allowed drivers to distract themselves simply by talking. Smart phones brought inattentive driving to a whole new level. The consequences can be tragic, Reyer said.

It might never be known why a work truck driver didn’t notice traffic was slowing in front of him Tuesday on I-5 before he slammed into the back of a semi-truck, killing him. There’s evidence he tried to break and swerve in the last moments.

In May, a 78-year-old man was killed while changing a tire along I-5 in Tacoma when he was struck by a driver distracted by her smart phone.

Reyer said he's still surprised by the amount of people he sees staring at their phones as he pulls alongside them. He took notice just this week as he was driving to a collision on I-5.

"I just looked left and right. People holding their phones to the ears, texting, looking down," he said. "I was in a fully marked big white police SUV with big light bars on the top, with push bars, with a big lightning bolt on the side of my car stating State Patrol. And I'm driving next to them for half a mile to a mile. They were oblivious."

#### DIVERTING RESOURCES

Statewide, the WSP places an emphasis on impaired driving, distracted driving, speed and seat belt use, said WSP spokesperson Darren Wright.

"Those are going to be very important to us," Wright said. "Because those are the biggest ones that directly affect people's lives."

After those priority items, it's up to each district captain to allocate resources and emphasis where they see fit, he said.

It's no secret that WSP needs more troopers. Even before 74 commissioned officers left the force over Gov. Jay Inslee's vaccine mandate last fall, the recruitment campaign was in full swing.

A current class of new troopers won't come close to meeting the 240 trooper deficit, Wright said. All new hires, even if they're experienced officers, must go through the WSP academy, he said.

Because of that trooper shortage, the WSP is less proactive and more reactive, Wright said. If you think you've seen less WSP patrol vehicles waiting for speeders to whiz by you'd be correct.

Instead, he said, they're responding to crashes and other calls. "We have to make sure that we are reactive to everything that the citizens call for," Wright said. "So, anytime there's a call for service, we're going to be there."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	02/19 Bird flu found at 4 <sup>th</sup> Indiana turkey farm
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/business/state-officials-bird-flu-found-at-4th-indiana-turkey-farm/">https://www.seattletimes.com/business/state-officials-bird-flu-found-at-4th-indiana-turkey-farm/</a>
GIST	<p>INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — Avian influenza has been detected in a fourth commercial poultry flock in southern Indiana, state officials said Saturday.</p> <p>Laboratory testing of a second commercial flock of turkeys in Greene County has come back as presumptively positive for the virus, the Indiana State Board of Animal Health said. The samples are being verified at the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Veterinary Services Laboratory in Iowa.</p> <p>Another possible case was found about 5 miles (8 kilometers) away in Greene County earlier in the week. Two previous cases were found in adjacent Dubois County.</p> <p>Pending test results should indicate if the virus is the same as that in the previous cases and if the virus is highly pathogenic.</p> <p>Officials have begun euthanizing the 15,200 birds at the latest farm to prevent the spread of the disease.</p> <p>A 10-kilometer (6.2-mile) circle has been established around the latest farm in Greene County. Thirteen commercial poultry flocks within the new control area are under quarantine and will be tested regularly, the board said.</p> <p>Animal Health Board staff have reached out to known hobby/backyard poultry owners in the new control area to schedule testing of birds there, it said.</p>

	<p>The agency said avian influenza does not present an immediate public health concern and no human cases of avian influenza viruses have been detected in the U.S.</p> <p>The turkey infections are the first confirmation of highly pathogenic bird flu in commercial poultry in the U.S. since 2020, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has said.</p> <p>A January 2016 outbreak of bird flu in Dubois County affected 11 poultry farms, resulting in the loss of more than 400,000 birds, the Animal Health Board said.</p> <p>Indiana ranks third nationally in turkey production.</p>
	<a href="#">Return to Top</a>

HEADLINE	<b>02/18 Mayor, police chief quiet over deleted texts</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/politics/seattle-council-member-says-deleted-texts-should-be-investigated-as-mayor-and-police-chief-keep-mum/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/politics/seattle-council-member-says-deleted-texts-should-be-investigated-as-mayor-and-police-chief-keep-mum/</a>
GIST	<p>Seattle Mayor Bruce Harrell and interim Police Chief Adrian Diaz aren't saying whether there will be an investigation to assess whether any civil rules or criminal laws were broken when text messages were deleted from the phones of former Mayor Jenny Durkan and former police Chief Carmen Best.</p> <p>But a City Council member and the head of a nonprofit dedicated to government transparency are calling for an outside investigation into how the texts from crucial weeks during 2020's racial justice protests went missing.</p> <p>"This is clearly a critically important moment in our city's history that we need to get to the bottom of, and only a full, fair and independent investigation can give us the answers we need," Councilmember Andrew Lewis said this week.</p> <p>A long-awaited forensic analysis released by the city last week <a href="#">indicated Durkan's phone was manually set to automatically delete texts</a> in July 2020, resulting in the deletion of texts between Oct. 30, 2019 and June 25, 2020. Durkan has said she did not delete the texts and noted that the majority of her deleted texts have since been reproduced from other phones.</p> <p>The forensic analysis, commissioned in response to lawsuits over the city's handling of the protests, also found data consistent with testimony Best gave in a November 2021 deposition that she "periodically deleted" her texts.</p> <p>Several state rules and laws — civil and criminal — govern the retention of public records, including texts, as well as violations related to destroying them.</p> <p>Guidelines for preserving public records require that texts and other communications by local elected officials about public business be kept for at least two years before being transferred to the state's archives "for appraisal and selective retention."</p> <p>Anyone who willfully destroys a public record that's supposed to be kept is guilty of a felony under state law. Most elected and public officials in Washington, including mayors, are required to take training that include information about retaining records.</p> <p>Last Saturday, after the analysis was released, Harrell said he would consult with City Attorney Ann Davison's office to determine an appropriate "legal course of action." But Harrell's office this week hasn't shared any next steps and Davison's office has declined to comment, citing attorney-client privilege.</p> <p>The analysis didn't determine who changed the text retention setting on Durkan's phone. The city's information technology department, which configured city phones, has said it's not the department's practice to change retention settings to delete messages.</p>

The analysis also didn't review why at least seven other officials, including fire Chief Harold Scoggins and several police commanders under Best, also failed to retain their texts from the summer of 2020.

Best hasn't yet commented on the forensic analysis, for which the city paid \$496,525 through 2021. When [asked about the matter](#) last May, Best said she didn't know how her texts disappeared, noting she thought her phone was being backed up.

Angelo Calfo, a lawyer representing some of the plaintiffs now suing the city, said Thursday his firm conducted the depositions of Durkan and Best in 2021 that are referenced in the city's forensic analysis, but the report didn't fully represent Best's testimony.

Best testified that "she periodically deleted some texts," Calfo said, but also testified that "she didn't have an explanation for why her phone, when given to us, had no texts on it."

Calfo added that Best testified, too, that "all of her texts on a second, personal phone she used during that time were also deleted after she had the phone reset at the Apple store."

Similarly, the city has said Scoggins in October 2020 lost his texts after getting locked out of his iPhone and getting it reset at the Apple store.

The city's Office of Police Accountability (OPA) isn't investigating Best or the other police commanders with missing texts, OPA interim director Gráinne Perkins said in an email Thursday. Former OPA director Andrew Myerberg opted "to allow this matter to be handled via the court" before leaving the OPA to take a job in Harrell's Cabinet a few weeks ago, Perkins added.

The missing texts are "still the subject of litigation," she said. "After this litigation is complete and if the OPA receives a formal referral, at that time the OPA will evaluate investigating the matter and whether the case needs to be sent to an outside entity for review."

Lewis said he planned to talk with Harrell and other officials about finding an appropriate way to pursue an investigation.

Councilmember Dan Strauss said only: "There are a lot of questions left unanswered that I would like to have the answers to." No other council members commented in response to questions this week.

Mike Fancher, a former Seattle Times executive editor who now serves as president of the Washington Coalition for Open Government, separately this week called for an investigation.

"There should be a neutral, third-party investigation," Fancher said. "If that investigation indicates there was criminal conduct, that should be pursued, as well."

During his mayoral campaign last year, Harrell described Best as a friend and a model police chief. Diaz was a close confidant of Best's and served as her top deputy. Last Saturday, a Harrell spokesperson said the mayor believed that "any potential investigation should involve a neutral third-party investigator," rather than the Police Department, "to prevent the appearance of a conflict of interest."

Some lawyers for plaintiffs suing the city over how the 2020 protests were handled have said there appears to have been deliberate destruction of public records and evidence in their cases.

Calfo, whose firm represents Capitol Hill businesses and residents suing over damage allegedly suffered because of Seattle's tolerance of a protest zone, said it's not his place to say if there should be a criminal probe.

"But we're doing our own investigation to get to the bottom of this and we're willing to share our findings with any law enforcement agency that wants to look at them," he said.

David Perez, representing Black Lives Matter Seattle-King County in a suit over the Police Department's protest response, said City Hall needs to act.

"The obvious next step here is for the city to determine who destroyed the evidence and hold that person or persons accountable," he said. "If the city doesn't ... then it's open season on public records. Any official or functionary can start destroying records."

Then-City Attorney Pete Holmes' office initially hired a California cybersecurity company to undertake the work in November 2020.

The public didn't find out about the deleted texts until May 2021, after a public records officer in Durkan's office filed a whistleblower complaint. At the time, Holmes' office said the forensic analysis would be done by late June 2021. Instead, the analysis was released much later, with Durkan and Holmes no longer serving at City Hall. Their terms expired at the end of 2021.

The Times is [suing the city](#) over how Durkan's office and the Police Department handled requests by reporters, some of which were made before texts were deleted.

A spreadsheet provided by the city last week to open-government activist Arthur West shows that a draft of the forensic analysis was provided to the city as early as June 2021.

This week, Davison's office said the city didn't receive the final analysis until last month. The office didn't respond to questions about why the work took that long.

According to the Police Department's policy manual, when supervisors become aware of allegations that an employee has violated any laws or rules, they're required to investigate or refer the matter to others. The manual also directs employees to report allegations of serious violations, including potential crimes, to supervisors or directly to the OPA.

When asked this week whether the department intends to investigate Best or the current commanders, or ask another agency to, a spokesperson for Diaz said the department "cannot make any comment about this due to the current litigation involving this issue."

Pierce Murphy, a former OPA director, said the matter is well within the OPA's authority to investigate, even though it involves an employee who no longer works for the department.

"We did investigate matters even after someone separated from the department, particularly if it was something of the importance to the public or the public's trust, or about the department's reputation," Murphy said.

Best should have been aware of the rules and laws related to public records, lawyers suing the city have said.

Calfo said his firm told Holmes' office in late June 2020 to preserve Durkan's, Best's and Scoggins' phones for evidence in the case.

"They didn't do that," he said.

Rebecca Boatright, the Police Department's director of legal affairs, said this week that department employees receive yearly, mandatory training on records retention and are required to affirm they've read department policies, which clearly set out their duties with regard to public records.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	02/18 Judge limits Teamsters concrete picketing
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/judge-limits-teamsters-picketing-after-concrete-companies-go-to-court-over-strike/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/judge-limits-teamsters-picketing-after-concrete-companies-go-to-court-over-strike/</a>



## GIST

A King County judge will limit some Teamsters picketing activity after five concrete companies whose workers are on strike alleged union picketers created safety issues as they stood in the way of vehicles coming and going from concrete facilities around the region.

King County Superior Court Commissioner Mark Hillman said he plans to impose “reasonable” restrictions on the picket lines.

“I’m afraid somebody is going to get hurt,” Hillman said.

The court fight marks an escalation in the tense strike that has dragged on for three months. About 330 mixer drivers are off the job, arguing for better pay and claiming management of the concrete companies refuse to bargain in good faith. The [companies say](#) they bargained in good faith and offered pay raises.

The strike has brought public and private construction projects across the region to a halt and caused thousands of layoffs in the building trades, by one labor group’s estimate. Public officials are pushing for a resolution, raising the specter of delays and cost hikes on [roads, bridges and other taxpayer-funded projects](#).

Both sides say they support mediation, but a session last month [ended without a resolution](#), and other meetings have so far not been set.

Strikers have formed picket lines at concrete plants since the start of the strike to slow vehicles trying to enter and exit the facilities.

Stoneway Concrete, Gary Merlino Construction, Cadman Materials, Lehigh Northwest Cement Company and CalPortland filed a complaint in King County Superior Court Wednesday alleging picketers are creating unsafe conditions.

The companies asked the court to issue a restraining order to stop picketers from blocking vehicles coming in and out of the facilities and to allow the companies to paint white lines 10 feet from the entrances and exits and only allow picketing outside the lines.

Teamsters Local 174 denied that picketers risked anyone’s safety, instead blaming inexperienced or aggressive drivers crossing the picket line. Attorneys for the union argued the dispute should be handled by the National Labor Relations Board and warned against curtailing union rights.

Hillman landed in the middle, restricting certain picketing activities but dismissing the white line idea and allowing the union to continue blocking some trucks for a limited amount of time.

“The union has an absolute right to strike. They have an absolute right to picket,” Hillman said.

“The intent of this order is to do the minimal amount that I see to keep the peace,” he said.

### **Safety allegations**

In court filings, the concrete companies allege picketers have become more aggressive and intimidating, shouting insults and blocking both commercial and personal vehicles coming in and out of the plants.

The companies said that when picketers blocked trucks from entering the facilities, they stranded them in traffic or on active train tracks and, in one case, caused a crash. A Teamsters steward said in a court filing the driver of the pickup involved in the crash parked in an unsafe location despite warnings.

Police were called on several occasions, but only intervened in certain instances such as picketers blocking personal vehicles, the companies said.

The union says it typically uses a “two-minute rule” to temporarily block vehicles entering or leaving concrete facilities, which the union says offers predictability so drivers know they will be able to enter or

leave after two minutes. But picketers staged an hourslong blockade in Redmond on Monday after police there said they would not enforce the two-minute rule, according to court filings.

Hillman said he would sign a written order to bar picketers from blocking trucks trying to get into facilities because of the potential for blocking traffic. Picketers can continue to block large commercial vehicles from leaving the plants for up to two minutes each, he said. They will not be allowed to block standard-size cars and pickups.

Hillman said his order would bar physical contact with vehicles, assaults, threats of bodily harm and vehicles charging at picketers. He said he would not limit the number of picketers or their use of bullhorns or sirens.

### **Limiting strike activity**

The Teamsters argued their strike activity is protected.

“Minor problems or isolated occurrences do not deprive picketing of its constitutional and statutory protections,” union attorneys wrote in a court filing.

Labor law experts say that while federal law generally protects workers’ right to strike, [courts can limit activity](#) that blocks people from entering and leaving facilities or involves threats of violence.

Judges consider, “Does this interfere with ingress and egress? Is it violent? Does it involve threats of violence? Is it inconsistent with peace and order?” said William Gould IV, a former chair of the National Labor Relations Board.

“And if a court is of the view that it meets that standard, then it can determine ... how the picket line is supposed to be reordered.”

The bar for limiting strike activity should be high, argued Cornell University labor law professor Angela Cornell.

“Our labor history is replete with many decades of obstruction and repression against workers, the exercise of workers’ collective rights,” Cornell said, “and that includes strike and picketing activity.

“It’s a rough-and-tumble world of striker and striker replacements and labor disputes, and generally the National Labor Relations Board can tolerate a fair amount of rough conduct on the picket line if there’s not violence and threats and if it doesn’t actually block the entrance to the facility.”

Hillman said he had the authority to “protect the domestic peace,” including preventing traffic blockages and ensuring concrete employees trying to leave in their personal vehicles could pass through pickets.

Teamsters attorney Kathleen Barnard said the union may challenge the decision.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	<b>02/18 US halts aid Burkina Faso; military coup</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/exclusive-us-halts-aid-burkina-faso-after-finding-military-coup-occurred-2022-02-18/">https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/exclusive-us-halts-aid-burkina-faso-after-finding-military-coup-occurred-2022-02-18/</a>
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON, Feb 18 (Reuters) - The United States has halted nearly \$160 million in U.S. aid to Burkina Faso after determining the January ouster of President Roch Kabore constituted a military coup, triggering aid restrictions under U.S. law, a State Department spokesperson told Reuters on Friday.</p> <p>The State Department made the determination, which had not been previously reported, after "careful review," a department spokesperson said. The decision was made in line with a U.S. law under which U.S. foreign aid - except funds to promote democracy - must be stopped to a country whose elected head of government is deposed by military coup or in a coup in which the military plays a decisive role.</p>

"The State Department assesses that a military coup took place in Burkina Faso," a spokesperson for the department said in an email. "Therefore, approximately \$158.6 million in foreign assistance that benefits the Government of Burkina Faso is restricted," it said.

In a notice to Congress, a copy of which was seen by Reuters, the State Department said it was exploring the possibility of overcoming the aid restrictions when in the U.S. national interest, notably to provide lifesaving assistance in the health sector.

The State Department said on Jan. 31 that it had paused most assistance to Burkina Faso after the country's military leader Paul-Henri Damiba led a junta that on Jan. 24 overthrew Kabore.

But Washington had not formally determined that the events in the West African country amounted to a coup and had not made a final decision on the fate of the aid.

Separately, Millennium Challenge Corporation, a U.S. government foreign assistance agency, said on its website that on Jan. 31 it had paused activity related to a compact agreement signed in August 2020 for \$450 million in funding to Burkina Faso. Such an agreement typically covers a five-year period.

The MCC did not immediately respond to an email on Friday asking if that assistance was now halted.

Damiba was sworn in as president this week. He had cited Kabore's inability to curb an Islamist insurgency that has killed thousands of people and forced more than one million people to flee their homes in the West African country.

The military coup in Burkina Faso followed takeovers in Mali, Guinea and Chad since 2020, raising fears of coup contagion among regional leaders.

It has also weakened France's West Africa alliances, given three of the coups - in Mali, Chad and Burkina Faso - have taken place in ex-French colonies. The military takeovers have also emboldened jihadists who control large swathes of territory and opened the door for Russia to fill the vacuum.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	02/19 Ukraine-Russia crisis: tension grinds on
SOURCE	<a href="https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-joe-biden-united-states-europe-vladimir-putin-e9e56b0091c4a2541609ae35661643c9">https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-joe-biden-united-states-europe-vladimir-putin-e9e56b0091c4a2541609ae35661643c9</a>
GIST	<p>Spiking tensions in eastern Ukraine are heightening Western fears of a Russian invasion and a new war in Europe, with U.S. President Joe <a href="#">Biden saying he's "convinced"</a> that Russian President Vladimir Putin has made the decision to invade.</p> <p>NATO countries fear that the volatile east, which has seen intense shelling in recent days and orders for civilians to evacuate, could be a <a href="#">flashpoint</a> in their tensest standoff with Russia since the Cold War, providing the Kremlin with a pretext to invade Ukraine.</p> <p>The United States upped its estimate of Russian troops for a possible invasion to as many as 190,000. Russia also plans to hold military exercises Saturday, including multiple practice launches of intercontinental ballistic missiles and cruise missiles in a display of military might.</p> <p>The United States and its European partners are keeping on with their strategy of <a href="#">diplomacy</a> and deterrence, offering to keep talking with the Kremlin while threatening heavy sanctions if an invasion happens.</p> <p>Here's a look at what is happening where and why:</p> <p>WHAT DID BIDEN SAY ABOUT PUTIN'S INTENTIONS?</p>

After weeks of saying the U.S. wasn't sure if Putin had made a final decision to launch an invasion, Biden said Friday he's now convinced he has and it could occur in the "coming days."

He said an invasion could include an assault on the capital, Kyiv.

Biden said he was confident in the new assessment because of the Americans' "significant intelligence capability."

In an interview with ABC News, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin backed up Biden's claim. Asked about the potential for a Russian invasion, Austin said, "I don't believe it's a bluff."

#### WHAT SANCTIONS WOULD RUSSIA FACE?

The U.S. has decided to hold off on at least one of the most crushing financial options available to punish Russia if it invades Ukraine, Deputy National Economic Council Director Daleep Singh told reporters at a White House briefing Friday.

Booting Russia out of the SWIFT financial system that moves money around the world was one of the most damaging steps the U.S. could take against the Russian economy, but it is opposed by some European allies for the spillover damage it would cause to their economies as well.

Asked Friday if Americans and their European allies — many of them more exposed to any collateral damage from sanctions hitting Russia's economy — were on the same page on specific financial penalties, Biden said he expected "slight" differences.

Singh described sanctions against Russian financial institutions and state-owned enterprises, as well as U.S. export controls that would deny Russia advanced technology it seeks for its industry and military.

At a time of high oil and gas prices, the U.S. also did not intend to try to block Russian energy from reaching global markets, he said, but gave no details.

Italy, which is heavily reliant on Russian gas, has pushed for energy to be kept out of any sanctions. Italian Premier Mario Draghi told reporters Friday that he laid out his government's view at a European Council meeting in Brussels a day earlier.

#### WHAT'S HAPPENING IN EASTERN UKRAINE?

In Ukraine's Donbas region, where fighting since 2014 between Ukrainian forces and Russian-backed rebels has killed some 14,000 people, the rebels announced in videos posted online Friday that they were ordering an "immediate evacuation" to Russia because of the unrest.

But metadata embedded in the video files showed they had been created two days earlier.

A group of international monitors in eastern Ukraine that is tasked with keeping the peace reported more than 500 explosions in the 24 hours ending Thursday midday.

On Friday, a car exploded outside the main government building in Donetsk, but no casualties were reported, and a U.N. Refugee Agency convoy came under shelling.

The rebels accuse Ukraine of preparing to invade the region, which Kyiv denies. The unrest may be part of Moscow's suspected playbook of portraying Ukraine as the aggressor, thereby giving Russia grounds to invade.

Putin sent his emergencies minister to the Rostov region bordering Ukraine to help organize the evacuation. He ordered the government to give 10,000 rubles (about \$130) to each evacuee. That's equivalent to about half the average monthly salary in the area.

## WHAT'S NEW ABOUT THE CYBERATTACKS?

The U.S. and Britain are blaming Russia for this week's cyberattacks targeting Ukraine's defense ministry and major banks.

Anne Neuberger, the White House's chief cyber official, said the attacks this week were of "limited impact" since Ukrainian officials were able to quickly get their systems back up and running, but it is possible that the Russians were laying the groundwork for more destructive ones.

She and the British Foreign Office linked Tuesday's attacks to Russian military intelligence officers.

## WHAT'S GOING ON AT THE KREMLIN?

The Kremlin says Putin will watch drills involving Russia's strategic nuclear forces from the situation room at the Russian Defense Ministry.

The Defense Ministry said Putin will personally oversee Saturday's display of his country's nuclear might. Notably, the planned exercise involves the Crimea-based Black Sea Fleet. Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula after seizing it from Ukraine in 2014.

## WHAT FORCES DOES RUSSIA HAVE NEAR UKRAINE?

The new U.S. estimate of up to 190,000 includes the Russian-backed separatists inside Ukraine, the Russian National Guard and Russian troops in Crimea, the peninsula that Russia seized from Ukraine in 2014. These forces were not counted in previous assessments of troops deployed near Ukraine's borders and in neighboring Belarus.

As further indication that the Russians are preparing for a potential invasion, a U.S. defense official said an estimated 40% to 50% of the ground forces deployed in the vicinity of the Ukrainian border have moved into attack positions nearer the border. The defense official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal U.S. military assessments.

The official also said the number of Russian ground units known as battalion tactical groups deployed in the border area had grown to as many as 125, up from 83 two weeks ago. Each battalion tactical group has 750 to 1,000 soldiers.

## WHAT HAS NATO DONE?

Meanwhile, NATO is beefing up its eastern regions.

The U.S. has begun deploying 5,000 troops to Poland and Romania. The Biden administration announced Friday it has approved a \$6 billion sale of 250 Abrams battle tanks and related equipment to Poland.

Britain is sending hundreds of soldiers to Poland and offering more warships and planes. It also is doubling the number of personnel in Estonia and sending tanks and armored fighting vehicles.

Germany, Norway and the Netherlands are sending additional troops to Lithuania. The Dutch government also is sending to Ukraine 100 sniper rifles, combat helmets and body armor, two mine detection robots and weapon-detection radar systems.

## WHAT ARE THE DIPLOMATIC EFFORTS TO PREVENT WAR?

Biden spoke by phone on Friday afternoon with a number of European leaders and the leaders of the European Union and NATO about the likelihood of Russian aggression, the White House said.

	<p>French President Emmanuel Macron, who was on the call, planned to speak with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Saturday and with Putin on Sunday.</p> <p>U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris and Secretary of State Antony Blinken were attending the annual Munich Security Conference in Germany. Moscow sent no delegates there.</p> <p>Harris indicated the alliance’s approach to the crisis would continue.</p> <p>“We remain, of course, open to and desirous of diplomacy, as it relates to the dialogue and the discussions we have had with Russia,” Harris said in Munich.</p> <p>“But we are also committed, if Russia takes aggressive action, to ensure there will be severe consequences in terms of the sanctions we have discussed,” she said at a meeting with NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg.</p> <p>German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock expressed regret that Russian leaders declined to attend the Munich conference.</p> <p>“Particularly in the current, extremely threatening situation, it would have been important to also meet Russian representatives in Munich,” Baerbock said. Even tiny steps toward peace would be “better than a big step toward war,” she added.</p>
	<a href="#">Return to Top</a>

HEADLINE	<b>02/18 Brazil mudslides: neglect, climate change</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://apnews.com/article/climate-caribbean-brazil-rio-de-janeiro-urbanization-8bff5ec89f4101e6d55582e460932e27">https://apnews.com/article/climate-caribbean-brazil-rio-de-janeiro-urbanization-8bff5ec89f4101e6d55582e460932e27</a>
GIST	<p>RIO DE JANEIRO (AP) — The landslides that devastated Petropolis this week demolished houses and ripped families apart, scarred hillsides and hearts, left at least 136 dead and more than 200 missing.</p> <p>And it was all largely predictable -- and to some degree, preventable.</p> <p>Rapid urbanization, poor planning, lack of financing for subsidized housing -- all of these things have afflicted this mountain city in Brazil’s Rio de Janeiro state. Little has been done in response to repeated warnings about the risks of mountainside construction, researchers as well as current and former public servants told The Associated Press.</p> <p>And with evidence indicating that climate change is causing more intense rainfall, peril has only increased — not just for Petropolis, but elsewhere as well.</p> <p>More than 1,500 people have died in similar landslides in recent decades in that portion of the Serra do Mar range. There have been more than 400 deaths from heavy storms in Petropolis alone since 1981.</p> <p>Antônio Guerra, a geography professor in the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, has studied weather-related catastrophes in Petropolis for almost 30 years. He has visited dozens of sites where houses and lives were swallowed by torrents of mud, and investigated the root causes.</p> <p>“Rain is the great villain, but the main cause is poor land use. There’s a total lack of planning,” Guerra said in a phone interview.</p> <p>Petropolis’s haphazard sprawl is recent. Nestled in the mountains some 40 miles from Rio de Janeiro and named for a former Brazilian emperor, Petropolis was among the nation’s first planned cities.</p> <p>Earlier settlers built stately homes along its waterways. But in recent decades the city’s prosperity has drawn newcomers from poorer regions and the population grew to about 300,000. Mountainsides are now</p>

covered with small homes packed tightly together, constructed by people who aren't fully aware of the dangers. Many have built without proper permissions because they can't afford to do so elsewhere.

Many high-risk areas are even more vulnerable due to deforestation or inadequate drainage, Guerra said. As time goes by, people forget disasters and return to devastated areas, building houses on unsafe ground.

For nearly two decades, Yara Valverde led the local office of the federal environmental regulator. In 2001, she started the city's first hydrogeological risk alert system, installing plastic bottles in communities to collect rainfall. When they reached a certain level, sirens blasted.

There was no public money allotted for the program, so she enlisted volunteers.

Between 2007 and 2010, Guerra and a team of civil engineers and geologists mapped risky areas in Petropolis and sent their findings to the city. The next January, heavy rain set off landslides that claimed nearly 1,000 lives, 71 of them in Petropolis. It was considered Brazil's worst-ever natural disaster.

The city has recognized the problem. In 2017, authorities noted that 18% of the city -- including about 20,000 households -- was at high or very high risk. Yet another 7,000 would also need to be relocated, according to a plan devised by the city which called for construction of affordable housing units and a halt to new construction in at-risk areas.

Guerra, Valverde, non-governmental organizations and residents say little has been done to execute that vision.

There is little available space in Petropolis for new, safe construction, and removing residents from existing homes is unpopular politically -- there's often nowhere to relocate residents near their original homes. Even before the pandemic slammed the local economy, Rio state was struggling to recover from a crushing, three-year recession.

But the Brazilian daily Folha de S. Paulo, citing official data, reported that Rio's state government spent less than half of the money earmarked for its disaster prevention and response program.

Rio state's construction and infrastructure secretariat said in an email to the AP that inspections of at-risk areas, housing policy and relocations are the city's responsibility.

The city did not reply to repeated requests for information on how many families had been relocated since 2017 and what other measures had been undertaken to carry out the plan.

President Jair Bolsonaro tried to deflect the blame, saying the budget for preventive measures is limited. "A lot of times, we have no way to guard against everything that might happen," he said Friday from Petropolis, responding to widespread outrage.

Heavy rains are typical in the region, especially during the Southern Hemisphere's summer, between December and March. But with climate change, the rains appear to be getting heavier, experts say.

Southeastern Brazil has been punished with heavy rains since the start of the year. More than 40 deaths were recorded between mudslides in Minas Gerais state in early January and Sao Paulo state later the same month. That followed months of drought — Brazil's worst in nine decades — that saw hydroelectric reservoirs in the southeast fall to levels that raised concern about possible power rationing.

"They are all weather extremes, happening very close to one another. Climate change also acts to increase the frequency of events, and we are clearly observing this," said Marcelo Seluchi, a coordinator at the government's National Center for Monitoring and Early Warning of Natural Disasters. "It's not about looking at a particular event, but the total."



On the eve of the latest landslide, Seluchi's center sent out a "very high" risk alert for Petropolis, warning of rains with "a potential to cause a great impact on the population." The agency recommended authorities consider evacuation of at-risk areas.

The following day, 259 millimeters (10 inches) of rain poured down in just three hours — by far the most since 1932, according to the center.

Speaking at a press conference on Wednesday, Rio Gov. Claudio Castro insisted the deluge was "totally unpredictable." He didn't comment on whether the destruction and loss of life could have been avoided.

Eighteen of Petropolis' 20 risk alert sirens sounded before Tuesday's fatal landslides, warning residents of a looming danger, but the AP could find no evidence that the officials called for evacuations.

Some residents told the AP they had received text messages from authorities, warning them about the coming storm. Others said they had received no notice at all. And with most of the city's sirens concentrated in the center of town, several districts were excluded.

The city didn't respond to multiple requests from the AP for comment.

Fernando Araújo, 46, said the government has ignored his neighborhood of Vila Felipe for as long as he can remember.

"As a resident living here for 46 years, I'm sure that as soon the sun comes out and the weather stabilizes they won't come here anymore and give attention to us. The people, on their own, will clean things up, rebuild, and sometime in the future this will happen again."

Valverde, the former environmental regulator who set up the risk alert system, said many cities in the region lack the political will to face up to the problem.

"They say they care, but when the time comes to make decisions, to remove houses in risk zones, to prevent new construction ... they end up giving in," she said.

"They have to be held accountable. If not, this will happen again and again."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	02/18 Ottawa police tow trucks, arrest protesters
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/canada-parliament-cancels-session-as-police-clamp-down-on-protesters-11645194677?mod=hp_featst_pos4">https://www.wsj.com/articles/canada-parliament-cancels-session-as-police-clamp-down-on-protesters-11645194677?mod=hp_featst_pos4</a>
GIST	<p>OTTAWA—Police moved in on protesters here Friday, towing heavy-duty trucks and making <a href="#">dozens of arrests</a> as they began clearing a 22-day demonstration against Covid-19 vaccine mandates that has <a href="#">paralyzed the capital's downtown</a> and inspired blockades of crucial U.S.-Canada border crossings.</p> <p>Interim Ottawa police chief Steve Bell said Friday afternoon that officers were in control of the situation on the ground, and "will continue to push forward to clear our streets."</p> <p>The plan, he added, "will take time and we are here to see it through to a safe ending."</p> <p>Friday's operation was an overwhelming show of force that followed weeks of minimal police involvement. It marked the beginning of a resolution to a standoff between police, who were wary of action that could inflame the situation, and protesters, many of whom vowed to stay put despite law-enforcement warnings.</p> <p>By Friday afternoon, police had cleared protesters away from some intersections in the eastern part of the demonstration zone. Ottawa police reported over 100 arrests, and 21 vehicles had been towed. Chief Bell declined to provide estimates on how many protesters and vehicles were left in the city's core.</p>

At least 10 truckers, fearing arrest and damage to their vehicles, opted to drive off after being parked for weeks on the street in front of Canadian legislative buildings.

Despite a strong police presence on the eastern end of the encampment, many protesters tried to keep a festive mood. A fiddler played on a stage. Food tents were offering meals. The crowd remained in the hundreds.

The number of vehicles in front of the parliament buildings, though, was noticeably thinner relative to previous days.

For three weeks, the demonstration has clogged traffic, frayed residents' nerves and forced businesses to close. The Ottawa police chief stepped down this week after facing widespread criticism, prompting the appointment of an interim commander.

Anthony Lammers, a protester, watched a line of police push protesters north on Friday afternoon, away from a key intersection where trucks have been parked for three weeks.

"It's over," said Mr. Lammers, who said he came to Ottawa from Hamilton on Thursday to join the protesters. "I think we didn't really know it last night, but this morning it was apparent that today was the day."

At one point, police used a crowbar to break open the door of a recreational vehicle that was parked near the edge of the encampment, blocking a route for truckers to leave. They arrested a man who had locked himself inside the RV, and the vehicle was towed.

One man who gave his name as Greg said he and a group of about 30 other truck drivers planned to go. "Instead of [police] smashing windows... we're all going to try and move," he said. "Because that way we get to keep our vehicles."

According to a statement broadcast on Facebook, a spokesman for the main protest organizers, under the banner Freedom Convoy 2022, said Friday marked a regrettable day for Canadians.

"The government declared war on its people," said Tom Marazzo, a former Canadian soldier. He said the protesters, who are demanding a restoration of freedoms, are being punished "for raising questions, for listening to their conscience, and for standing up for yourself."

The government, however, said it was time to bring back order in the city.

"What we have seen over the past three weeks has been deeply disturbing," said Chrystia Freeland, Canada's finance minister and deputy prime minister. "Canadians have the right to peace, order and good government, and we will restore it."

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau invoked sparingly used emergency powers that allowed authorities to designate certain areas—including the streets around Parliament Hill—as no-protest zones where people could be subject to arrest, and to compel service providers like tow-truck operators to remove vehicles from the scene. The powers also took aim at protesters' financial assets and sources of cash.

As part of the crackdown this week, Canada extended the scope of money-laundering laws to target the protesters' sources of cash. All banks and financial-services providers are required to stop providing financial services, such as automobile insurance, and freeze any assets held by any person or organization engaged in the protests, according to government orders.

Also this week, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police asked cryptocurrency exchanges to stop "facilitating any transactions" made by 34 cryptocurrency addresses. Torstein Braaten, chief compliance officer of cryptocurrency exchange Bitbuy, said the emergency order has made it easier for the exchange to freeze

crypto accounts. Absent the order, the exchange would have had more leeway in deciding what was suspicious activity that needed to be reported.

Ms. Freeland said bank accounts belonging to people involved with the protests were being frozen. She declined to say how many accounts were affected so far, citing concern that doing so could interfere with a continuing operation.

Just before midday Friday, hundreds of police and paramedic vehicles assembled on the eastern edge of the main protest zone. At least 100 police officers walked in a formation, first in a line, and then stood shoulder to shoulder across a four-lane street, preparing to head toward the main protest zone. Protesters formed their own line in an attempt to thwart the police. There was pushing and shoving between police and protesters as some arrests were made.

Ottawa police said Friday they had filed three charges against convoy organizer Chris Barber that included counseling to commit mischief and obstruction of justice. Tamara Lich, another organizer, is charged with counseling mischief.

Marika Morris, who lives roughly eight blocks south of the parliament buildings and main protest zone, said Friday she's hoping life in Ottawa can return to normal quickly. She said she is tired of inhaling vehicle fumes and the incessant honking.

"A lot of the protesters seem to be having a good time there. It's a party atmosphere down there. They don't understand how Ottawa residents feel," Ms. Morris said.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	02/18 US power grid increasingly unreliable
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/americas-power-grid-is-increasingly-unreliable-11645196772">https://www.wsj.com/articles/americas-power-grid-is-increasingly-unreliable-11645196772</a>
GIST	<p>The U.S. electrical system is becoming less dependable. The problem is likely to get worse before it gets better.</p> <p>Large, sustained outages have occurred with increasing frequency in the U.S. over the past two decades, according to a Wall Street Journal review of federal data. In 2000, there were fewer than two dozen major disruptions, the data shows. In 2020, the number surpassed 180.</p> <p>Utility customers on average experienced just over eight hours of power interruptions in 2020, more than double the amount in 2013, when the government began tracking outage lengths. The data doesn't include 2021, but those numbers are certain to follow the trend after a freak freeze in Texas, a major hurricane in New Orleans, wildfires in California and a heat wave in the Pacific Northwest left millions in the dark for days.</p> <p>The U.S. power system is faltering just as millions of Americans are <a href="#">becoming more dependent on it</a>—not just to light their homes, but increasingly to work remotely, charge their phones and cars, and cook their food—as more modern conveniences become electrified.</p> <p>At the same time, the grid is undergoing the largest transformation in its history. In many parts of the U.S., utilities are no longer the dominant producers of electricity following the creation of a patchwork of regional wholesale markets in which suppliers compete to build power plants and sell their output at the lowest price. Within the past decade, natural gas-fired plants began displacing pricier coal-fired and nuclear generators as fracking unlocked cheap gas supplies. Since then, wind and solar technologies have become increasingly cost-competitive and now rival coal, nuclear and, in some places, gas-fired plants.</p> <p>Regulators in many parts of the country are attempting to further speed the build-out of renewable energy in response to concerns about climate change. A number of states have enacted mandates to eliminate carbon emissions from the grid in the coming decades, and the Biden administration has set a goal to do so by 2035.</p>

The pace of change, hastened by market forces and long-term efforts to reduce carbon emissions, has raised concerns that power plants will retire more quickly than they can be replaced, creating new strain on the grid at a time when other factors are converging to weaken it.

One big factor is age. Much of the transmission system, which carries high-voltage electricity over long distances, was constructed just after World War II, with some lines built well before that. The distribution system, the network of smaller wires that takes electricity to homes and businesses, is also decades old, and accounts for the majority of outages.

A report last year by the American Society of Civil Engineers found that 70% of transmission and distribution lines are well into the second half of their expected 50-year lifespans. Utilities across the country are ramping up spending on line maintenance and upgrades. Still, the ASCE report anticipates that by 2029, the U.S. will face a gap of about \$200 billion in funding to strengthen the grid and meet renewable energy goals.

Another factor is the changing climate. Historically unusual weather patterns are placing great stress on the electric system in many parts of the U.S., leading to outages.

Weather-related problems have driven much of the increase in large outages shown in federal data, topping 100 in 2020 for the first time since 2011. Scientists have tied some of the weather patterns, such as California's prolonged drought and wildfires and the severity of floods and storms throughout the country, to climate change. They project that such events will likely increase in years to come. Unlike electric systems in Europe, distribution and transmission lines in the U.S. were typically built overhead instead of buried underground, which makes them more vulnerable to high winds and other weather.

Those weather extremes are raising the costs of power network upgrades for utilities all over the country. That in turn is set to raise power bills for homeowners and businesses.

Public Service Enterprise Group Inc., which serves 2.3 million electric customers in New Jersey, plans to invest as much as \$16 billion in transmission and distribution improvements over the next five years to replace aging equipment and make the grid more resilient to extreme weather events, such as a highly unusual spate of tornadoes that swept the state last year.

Ralph Izzo, PSEG's chief executive, said the plan is critical to ensuring reliability, especially as customers become more dependent on the grid to charge electric vehicles and replace traditional furnaces and gas appliances with electric alternatives. The movement toward electrification is in part driven by consumers, amid mounting concerns about climate change, as well as initiatives among cities and towns to enact mandates aimed at phasing out natural gas for cooking and heating.

"That resiliency needs to be further enhanced, because the solutions to climate change are going to put more challenges on the grid," Mr. Izzo said. "Those are the kinds of things that really keep you awake at night."

The historic shift to new sources of energy has created another challenge. A decade ago, coal, nuclear and gas-fired power plants—which can produce power around the clock or fire up when needed—supplied the bulk of the nation's electricity. Since then, wind and solar farms, whose output depends on weather and time of day, have become some of the most substantial sources of power in the U.S., second only to natural gas.

Grid operators around the country have recently raised concerns that the intermittence of some electricity sources is making it harder for them to balance supply and demand, and could result in more shortages. When demand threatens to exceed supply, as it has during severe hot and cold spells in Texas and California in recent years, grid operators may call on utilities to initiate rolling blackouts, or brief intentional outages over a region to spread the pain among everyone and prevent the wider grid from a total failure.

Companies around the country are rapidly adding large-scale batteries to store more intermittent power so it can be discharged during peak periods after the sun falls and wind dies. But because such storage technology is somewhat new, and was, until recently, relatively expensive, it remains a small fraction of the electricity market, and grid operators agree much more will be needed to keep the system stable as more conventional power plants retire.

The problem could soon threaten New York City. The New York Independent System Operator, or NYISO, which oversees the state's power grid, last month warned of possible supply shortages in the coming years as several gas-fired power plants close or operate less frequently in light of stricter state air quality rules. New York, which has set a goal to eliminate emissions from its electricity supplies by 2040 and no longer has any coal-fired power plants, also recently shut down a nuclear plant some 30 miles north of Manhattan after critics for years called it a safety hazard.

NYISO said its reserve margins—how much electricity it has available beyond expected demand—are shrinking, increasing the risk of outages. A 98-degree, sustained heat wave could result in shortfalls within New York City as soon as next year, a circumstance that would likely force NYISO to call for rolling blackouts for the first time ever.

“We already foresee razor-thin margins,” said Zach Smith, NYISO's vice president of system and resource planning. “The risk is compounded when we take into consideration unforeseen events.”

New York is adding substantial amounts of new wind and solar generation, as well as battery storage, and NYISO has said that it is critical that the projects remain on track to improve the stability of the system in the coming years. Already, wind and solar developers across the country are facing headwinds related to supply-chain issues, inflation and the amount of time it often takes to get approval to connect to the grid.

The North American Electric Reliability Corp., a nonprofit overseen by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission that develops standards for utilities and power producers, warned in a report last month that the Midwest and West also face risks of supply shortages in the coming years as more conventional power plants retire.

Within the footprint of the Midcontinent Independent System Operator, or MISO, which oversees a large regional grid spanning from Louisiana to Manitoba, Canada, coal- and gas-fired power plants supplying more than 13 gigawatts of power are expected to close by 2024 as a result of economic pressures, as well as efforts by some utilities to shift more quickly to renewables to address climate change. Meanwhile, only 8 gigawatts of replacement supplies are under development in the area. Unless more is done to close the gap, MISO could see a capacity shortfall, NERC said. MISO said it is aware of this potential discrepancy but declined to comment on the reasons for it.

Curt Morgan, CEO of Vistra Corp. , which operates the nation's largest fleet of competitive power plants selling wholesale electricity, said he is worried about reliability risks in New York, New England and other markets as state and federal policy makers pursue ambitious goals to quickly phase out fossil fuel-fired power plants. His concern is that the plants will retire before replacements such as wind, solar and battery storage come online, he said, given the cost and challenge of quickly building enough batteries to have meaningful supply reserves.

“Everything is tied to having electricity, and yet we're not focusing on the reliability of the grid. That's absurd, and that's frightening,” he said. “There's such an emotional drive to get where we want to get on climate change, which I understand, but we can't throw out the idea of having a reliable grid.”

Serious electricity supply constraints have historically been rare. Most recently, the Texas grid operator called for sweeping outages during an unusually strong winter storm last February that caused power plants and natural gas facilities of all kinds to fail in subfreezing temperatures. Millions of people were in the dark for days, and more than 200 died.

California, which experienced outages during a West-wide heat wave in the summer of 2020, also called on residents to conserve power several times last summer amid a historic drought that constrained hydroelectric power generation across the region. The state is now racing to secure large amounts of renewable energy and batteries in the coming years to account for the closure of several conventional power plants, as well as potential constraints on power imported from other states when temperatures rise.

California state Sen. Bill Dodd, Democrat from Napa, recently introduced legislation that would require the state's electricity providers to offer programs that compensate large industrial power users for quickly reducing electricity use when supplies are tight, helping to ease strain on the grid.

"We just can't go down the road of having rolling blackouts again," Mr. Dodd said. "People expect their government to keep the lights on, and our reliability situation in California still isn't where it needs to be."

Similar challenges have emerged elsewhere in the West. PNM Resources Inc., a utility that provides electricity for more than 525,000 customers in New Mexico, has warned that it would likely have to resort to rolling blackouts this coming summer, following the June retirement of a large coal-fired power plant. It has recently proposed keeping one of the generating units online for an extra three months to help meet demand during the hottest months of the year.

Tom Fallgren, PNM's vice president of generation, said the company faced significant delays in getting regulatory approval for several solar projects to replace the coal plant's output, as well as construction delays tied to supply-chain issues. A spokeswoman for the New Mexico Public Regulation Commission said the agency does its best to address all utility proposals in a fair and timely manner.

Mr. Fallgren said he anticipates even steeper challenges in the coming years as the company works to replace output from a nuclear plant with a combination of renewable energy and battery storage.

"We used to do resource planning on a spreadsheet. It used to be very simple," he said. "The math is just astronomically more complicated today."

One of the biggest challenges facing grid operators and utility companies is the need for better technology that can store large amounts of electricity and discharge it over days, to account for longer weather events that affect wind and solar output. Most large-scale batteries currently use lithium-ion technology, and can discharge for about four hours at most.

Form Energy Inc., a company that is working to develop iron-air batteries as a multiday alternative to lithium-ion, recently announced plans to work with Georgia Power, a utility owned by Southern Co., to develop a battery capable of supplying as many as 15 megawatts of electricity for 100 hours. It would be a significant demonstration of the technology, which the company is aiming to broadly commercialize by 2025.

Form Energy CEO Mateo Jaramillo said the U.S. has ample capability to produce power, but increasingly finds itself short on electricity during periods of high demand and low production as the generation mix changes.

"That's sort of a feature of this new grid that we find ourselves with today," he said.

Other outage risks are mounting as extreme weather events test the strength of the grid itself. A spate of strong storms in Michigan last summer left hundreds of thousands of residents in the dark for days as utility companies rushed to make repairs. DTE Energy Co., a utility with 2.2 million electricity customers in southeastern Michigan, had more than 100,000 customers lose power.

CEO Jerry Norcia called the storm barrage unprecedented, and said the company needed to invest more heavily in reliability. DTE now plans to spend an additional \$90 million to keep trees away from power lines and is working to hire more people to help maintain its system. But it may take time for such utility improvements to fully materialize, and meanwhile, consumers may suffer further inconveniences.

	<p>Michael Fuhlhage, a professor at Wayne State University who lives just outside of Detroit, hadn't thought much about the power grid until a few years ago, when he began noticing an uptick in the number of times severe weather caused his lights to go out. He has since started measuring outage length by the number of trash bags it takes to clean out his fridge.</p> <p>In August, a storm caused a dayslong outage while he was visiting family, and he returned home to find a mess of spoiled food.</p> <p>"That was probably a three-garbage bag storm," he said. "We worry every time there's some kind of weather coming in now, and that's not an anxiety we had to deal with before."</p>
	<a href="#">Return to Top</a>

HEADLINE	<b>02/19 Russia test-launches ballistic missiles</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/russia-test-launches-ballistic-and-cruise-missiles-11645271129?mod=hp_lead_pos1">https://www.wsj.com/articles/russia-test-launches-ballistic-and-cruise-missiles-11645271129?mod=hp_lead_pos1</a>
GIST	<p>MOSCOW—Russia Saturday test-launched ballistic and cruise missiles in what it described as strategic deterrence exercises, a pointed reminder of its ability wage nuclear war amid <a href="#">a standoff with the West over Ukraine</a>.</p> <p>President <a href="#">Vladimir Putin</a> personally oversaw the launches from a command center alongside his Belarusian ally and counterpart Alexander Lukashenko, a Kremlin pool report said.</p> <p>A combination of ballistic and cruise missiles were to be launched <a href="#">as part of the maneuvers</a>, which involved the country's strategic missile forces and the Black Sea fleet, the Kremlin said, according to Russia's Defense Ministry television channel, Zvezda.</p> <p>The exercises come as the U.S. and North Atlantic Treaty Organization warn that Russia, which has amassed between 169,000 and 190,000 military personnel near Ukraine and in Crimea, is preparing a massive Russian attack on its smaller neighbor. President Biden warned Friday that he expected Mr. Putin to invade Ukraine in the coming days, with targets including the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv.</p> <p>On Saturday, leaders of the Russian-led breakaway regions eastern Ukraine's Donbas region called on all able men to take up arms to defend their territory, in a move that could escalate tensions toward a full-scale war. Washington has warned that Moscow is looking for an excuse to start hostilities in the region, where roughly 14,000 people have died in fighting since Russia fomented a separatist uprising there in 2014, sending weapons and troops across the border.</p>
	<a href="#">Return to Top</a>

HEADLINE	<b>02/18 Covid raises risk of mental health disorders</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/18/covid-infection-increases-risk-mental-health-disorder-study">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/18/covid-infection-increases-risk-mental-health-disorder-study</a>
GIST	<p>Having Covid-19 puts people at a significantly increased chance of developing new mental health conditions, potentially adding to existing crises of suicide and overdoses, according to new research looking at millions of health records in the US over the course of a year.</p> <p>The long-term effects of having Covid are still being discovered, and among them is an increased chance of being diagnosed with mental health disorders. They include depression, anxiety, stress and an increased risk of substance use disorders, cognitive decline, and sleep problems – a marked difference from others who also endured the stress of the pandemic but weren't diagnosed with the virus.</p> <p>"This is basically telling us that millions and millions of people in the US infected with Covid are developing mental health problems," said Ziyad Al-Aly, chief of research and development at the VA St Louis Healthcare System and senior author of the paper. "That makes us a nation in distress."</p>



The higher risk of mental health disorders, including suicidal ideation and opioid use, is particularly concerning, he said.

“This is really almost a perfect storm that is brewing in front of our eyes – for another opioid epidemic two or three years down the road, for another suicide crisis two or three years down the road,” Al-Aly added.

These unfolding crises are “quite a big concern”, said James Jackson, director of behavioral health at Vanderbilt University’s ICU Recovery Center, who was not involved with this study. He is also seeing patients whose previous conditions, including anxiety, depression and opioid use disorder, worsened during the pandemic.

Research like this shows the clear need to follow patients in the weeks and months after even mild Covid diagnoses and to seek quick treatment for any emerging disorders, the experts said. “If we apply attention to it now and nip it in the bud, we could literally save lives,” Al-Aly said.

More than 18% of Covid patients developed mental health problems, compared with 12% of those who did not have Covid, according to the [study](#) published on Wednesday.

The study followed more than 153,000 patients who tested positive for Covid in the Veterans Affairs health system between March 2020 and January 2021, and compared them with other health records: to 5.8 million people who did not test positive in that time, but lived through the same stresses of the pandemic, and with 5.6 million patients seen before the pandemic.

Among all patients who developed new mental health problems during the pandemic, the Covid patients were significantly more likely to develop cognitive problems (80%), sleep disorders (41%), depression (39%), stress (38%), anxiety (35%) and opioid use disorder (34%), compared with those who didn’t have Covid.

The study looked only at patients with no history of mental health diagnoses in the past two years. It compared those hospitalized for Covid versus other illnesses, and compared outcomes to thousands of flu cases. The study also adjusted for factors like demographics, other health conditions and other factors.

The results were all clear: Covid has a marked effect on mental health.

Those with more severe cases of Covid, especially those who need to be hospitalized, tend to be at higher risk. But even those with mild or asymptomatic cases were more likely to receive mental health diagnoses.

“People who were hospitalized had it worse, but the risk in non-hospitalized [patients] is significant and absolutely not trivial – and that represents the majority of people in the US and the world,” Al-Aly said.

The study did have some limitations: most of those analyzed were older white men. But controlling for race, gender and age found no changes in risk.

The coronavirus can be found in the brain, other studies have shown. “We can actually see the virus in the amygdala, in the hippocampus – the very centers responsible for regulating our moods, regulating our emotions,” Al-Aly said.

The study adds to other research showing that “mental health issues are a huge concern” after Covid, Jackson said. And the results line up with what he sees among patients.

“We’re learning that Covid may be even more problematic and more impactful than we thought,” Jackson said.

Early treatment of patients facing new or additional mental health challenges after Covid can make a crucial difference, the experts said.

“The idea here is to identify patients’ data early to hopefully reduce this from becoming a much larger problem down the road,” Al-Aly said. “If you leave a disease unattended, it only gets worse.”

But the longer the virus continues circulating, the more long-term problems it may create – adding even greater pressure to health systems.

“The wave of people with mental health disorders is going to be hitting the clinics in the next year or two or three, as a result of Covid and as a result of the pandemic,” Al-Aly said.

And many mental health practitioners don’t accept insurance, creating a large stumbling block for patients, while others have long waiting lists.

“This is a gigantic problem, and I’m not really sure what we’re going to do about it,” Jackson said. “The needs are vastly greater than the resources.”

Jackson has set up peer support groups to offer counseling to patients dealing with long Covid – brain fog, cognitive impairment, memory problems, feelings of inadequacy. The groups are held on Zoom, so patients can join from all over the country.

“We need to pay attention to the long-term consequences of Covid,” Al-Aly said. “If we only pay attention to the short-term consequences, the first 30 days or the first 90 days, we really, really are missing the larger picture.

“The pandemic itself caught the US unprepared, and we’re going to be caught unprepared again for long Covid,” Al-Aly said. “The reality is that Covid is producing long-term consequences, and we cannot just wish it away or sweep it under the rug or not deal with it.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	<b>02/18 NYC targets homeless from subway nights</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/feb/18/new-york-city-removing-homeless-from-subways-at-night">https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/feb/18/new-york-city-removing-homeless-from-subways-at-night</a>
GIST	<p>New York leaders on Friday released a plan to strictly enforce rules on the New York City subway as part of an aggressive effort to remove homeless people from the city’s sprawling transit system.</p> <p>“No more just doing whatever you want,” said the New York City mayor, Eric Adams, at a press conference announcing the plan on Friday in a subway station in lower Manhattan. “Those days are over. Swipe your MetroCard, ride the system and get off at your destination. That’s what this administration is saying.”</p> <p>New York police department (NYPD) officers will be given a “clear mandate” to enforce the subway’s rules of conduct, which includes prohibitions against lying down, creating an unsanitary environment and smoking or openly using drugs.</p> <p>The plan comes in light of an uptick in felony assaults in the subway which, while rare, were up 25% in 2021 compared with 2019. Last month, the death of an Asian American woman who was shoved off a subway platform into the path of a train prompted forceful promises from Adams, who took office in early January, to increase law enforcement in the subway system. Adams in January vowed to increase subway inspections and add 1,000 more cops to the system.</p> <p>Under the plan, NYPD officers will undergo additional training on enforcing the rules of conduct. The city said that officers will be stationed at the end of subway lines, where all passengers will be required – rather than encouraged – to leave the train.</p> <p>Along with increasing enforcement, Adams and New York’s governor, Kathy Hochul, said the city and state will expand outreach services to unhoused people who may be living within the subway system. In addition to the nearly 50,000 people who live in the city’s shelter system, an estimated 2,400 people live unsheltered in the city, many turning to the subways at night for warmth.</p>

More response teams will offer mental health support to those unhoused, increasing the number of mental health professionals that respond to non-violent 911 calls and expanding “safe haven” beds that provide shelter and on-site social services. The city says it will also create new drop-in centers close to key subway stations that will provide “an immediate pathway for individuals to come indoors”.

“This is not about arresting people, this is about arresting a problem. We’re going to correct the conditions,” Adams said on Friday. “It is cruel and inhumane to allow unhoused people to live on the subway, and unfair to paying passengers and transit workers who deserve a clean, orderly and safe environment. The days of turning a blind eye to this growing problem are over.”

At the press conference, Adams also noted that “it’s a big mistake not enforcing fare evasion”, saying that he plans to raise the issue of possible action against fare evasion with the Manhattan district attorney, Alvin Bragg.

Adams’s plan is just the latest in the long history of police enforcement in the subway system, which is run by the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), a state-level agency. In 2019, former governor Andrew Cuomo stirred controversy by vowing a crackdown on homelessness and fare evasion in the subway system by adding more police officers to patrol the system.

Some advocates for unhoused people living in the city say that, given its historic shortage of stable temporary and permanent housing, increased enforcement on the subway does not solve homelessness.

“Forcing people off the trains into the freezing cold does not help the homeless. Policing does not get people safely housed,” said Peter Malvan, a homeless advocate with the Urban Justice Center’s Safety Net Project, in a statement. “This approach is wrongheaded, unlawful and is a frightening path to criminalization.”

New leaders now say that safety concerns have held back efforts to increase ridership in the subway system, which hovers just above 50% of pre-pandemic levels.

“People tell me about their fear of using the system, and we’re going to ensure that fear is not New York’s reality,” Adams said. “We are back again, and it’s imperative we have the right response that has the combination of being human but clear.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	<b>02/19 Ukraine rebels: full military mobilization</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/19/ukraine-rebels-order-full-mobilisation-as-putin-oversees-missile-launch-drills">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/19/ukraine-rebels-order-full-mobilisation-as-putin-oversees-missile-launch-drills</a>
GIST	<p>Separatist leaders in eastern Ukraine have ordered a full military mobilisation, further escalating tensions in the region after Washington said Moscow would invade within days, and Ukraine’s president headed to Europe to drum up support.</p> <p>As the Kremlin said that Vladimir Putin will oversee major military drills along Ukraine’s borders on Saturday, the head of the pro-Russian separatist government in the Donetsk region, Denis Pushilin, released a statement announcing a war footing and urging reservists to show up at military enlistment offices.</p> <p>Shortly after the announcement on Saturday morning, a second separatist leader, Leonid Pasechnik of the self-proclaimed Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR), signed a decree calling for a full military mobilisation, according to Reuters.</p> <p>The statements added to the febrile situation in eastern Ukraine, where the rebels have ordered mass evacuations in the face of alleged shelling and mortar attacks by the Ukrainian army.</p>

The US president, Joe Biden, renewed his warnings on Friday night that a Russian invasion of its neighbour could happen at any time, and said that claims by pro-Moscow separatists in eastern Ukraine that they were under attack by Ukrainian government forces were “fabricated”.

Monitors from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe said on Saturday they had seen a significant rise in the number of attacks along the front line, particularly in the separatist areas of Donetsk and Lugansk, fuelling western fears that Moscow could use it as a pretext for an invasion.

The Pentagon also said that 40% of Russia’s estimated 150,000-strong forces on the border were in “attack position”. US officials think that the total number of troops is 190,000 when Ukrainian pro-Moscow rebels are included in the figure.

Compounding western concern about Russia’s military buildup, Russia’s defence ministry announced that Putin would personally oversee drills on Saturday that will involve multiple practice missile launches.

The Kremlin denies it has any plans to attack Ukraine and added to the war of words on Saturday morning by rejecting US allegations that it was responsible for cyber-attacks on Ukrainian banking and government websites earlier in the week.

“We categorically reject these baseless statements of the administration and note that Russia has nothing to do with the mentioned events and in principle has never conducted and does not conduct any ‘malicious’ operations in cyberspace,” the Russian embassy in the US said on Twitter.

The US deputy national security adviser, Anne Neuberger, said on Friday that Russian military intelligence was behind the recent spate of distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks that briefly knocked Ukrainian banking and government websites offline.

Speaking in Washington on Friday night, Biden said that the invasion would come in the next week or days and that his Russian counterpart Putin had “made the decision” to invade. But Biden left the door open for a diplomatic resolution.

“Russia has a choice between war and all the suffering it will bring or diplomacy that will make a future for everyone,” Biden said at the White House.

“[Putin’s] focused on trying to convince the world he has the ability to change the dynamics in Europe in a way that he cannot,” Biden added.

The Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, was due to travel to Germany on Saturday to meet western leaders at the Munich security conference, including the US vice-president, Kamala Harris, the German chancellor, Olaf Scholz, and the British foreign secretary, Liz Truss.

But Biden questioned whether it was a “wise choice” for Ukraine’s leader to leave his country as war fears reached a fever pitch.

There were growing fears that a spark, which Washington warns could be a deliberate “false flag” incident orchestrated by Moscow, could set off the largest military confrontation in Europe since the second world war.

The Nato chief, Jens Stoltenberg, who will also be at the Munich security conference, warned the size of the assembled Russian force far exceeded that needed for military drills, and that Russia had the capacity to invade without warning.

France and Germany have urged Russia to use its influence on rebels in Ukraine’s disputed east to “encourage restraint and contribute to de-escalation”.

	<p>An Agence France-Presse reporter near the front between Ukrainian government forces and pro-Russian separatists in the Lugansk region heard explosions and saw damaged civilian buildings on Kyiv's side of the line.</p> <p>Officials told local media that 25,000 people had left Lugansk and more than 6,000 had left Donetsk for Russia. There were reports of long car queues at checkpoints in Donetsk.</p> <p>Seeking to reverse the aggressor narrative, Moscow-backed leaders have accused Kyiv of planning an offensive to retake the eastern territories. The evacuations of civilians there were said to be in response to worries about a government attack.</p> <p>Russian news agencies quoted officials in Lugansk saying there had been two explosions within an hour on a gas pipeline but the fires were under control.</p> <p>But the US secretary of state, Antony Blinken, who will meet his Russian counterpart for talks on Thursday, according to Biden, accused the Kremlin of mounting a propaganda campaign to create an excuse for war.</p> <p>Biden again ruled out sending US troops into Ukraine, but his administration reiterated that it would hit Moscow with costly sanctions that would transform Russia into "a pariah to the international community".</p>
	<a href="#">Return to Top</a>

HEADLINE	<b>02/18 US lifts Mexico avocado ban</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2022/02/18/mexico-avocado-ban/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2022/02/18/mexico-avocado-ban/</a>
GIST	<p>For foodies, workers, restaurant owners and investors on both sides of the Rio Grande border, Friday brought a sigh of relief after the United States lifted its temporary ban on imports of Mexican avocados.</p> <p>The week-long pause — albeit a short one — had fueled concerns in the avocado industry, from the workers who pick the fruit in Mexico to consumers worrying about a potential shortage of a staple in the diets of many Americans.</p> <p>Mexico supplies about 80 percent of the avocados eaten in the United States. The import ban — stemming from <a href="#">purported threats to a U.S. inspector</a> in the Latin American country — shook a billion-dollar industry. Not only did the commotion showcase the law enforcement issues that growers are frequently subjected to in Mexico, but experts said it underscored the importance of one of the strongest and most successful bilateral trade agreements.</p> <p>Before being smeared into toast or squashed into guacamole, the avocado's life begins in an orchard in Michoacán — a western Mexican state over a thousand miles away from the border and the only one allowed to send over avocados to the United States. From a bright-green fruit hanging atop trees to its final stage inside American kitchens, the avocado's journey from seed to food encompasses different phases of inspections and agreements between the two nations — which suddenly took a hit.</p> <p>Last week, a plant safety inspector from the U.S. Agriculture Department's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service was inspecting avocados in Michoacán, when he saw some avocados that looked suspiciously like they came from another state, according to USDA and other industry experts. He raised a red flag and soon after, he received a voice-mail threat. Then <a href="#">the USDA announced it was shutting down imports</a> until it could be assured its agents were safe.</p> <p>The potential of an impending shortage quickly rippled across the industry — one that came shortly before the Super Bowl, one of the avocado's biggest events. Soon, food establishments and groceries began worrying about keeping up with a demand that has exponentially increased throughout the past decade.</p> <p>Prices for the fruit deemed "green gold" were already 100 percent higher than the previous year, said David Magaña, a senior analyst for RaboResearch Food &amp; Agribusiness. But the year-long availability of</p>

avocados had also increased as well — indicating that a surge in demand can be attributed to different factors, he said.

For one, avocados, with their versatility and healthy fat attributes, became [a food trend and Internet obsession](#). At the same time, the [Hispanic population booms](#) across the country — with a larger share of Latinos among Gen Z — have been “one of the major forces pulling the demand for avocados,” the analyst said.

But behind all those green juices and avocado Instagram-worthy photos is the partnership between Mexico and the United States — which has played a crucial role in enabling the market to expand.

In 1995 — a time when “fat-free” food staples ruled the market — the United States did not have much of a taste for avocados. The majority of the consumed fruit was produced in California. Avocado imports that year totaled \$14.7 million, of which \$700,000 came from Mexico, said David Orden, a professor in the department of agricultural and applied economics at Virginia Tech.

Mexico’s avocados had been banned in the decades before the North American Free Trade Agreement from 1994, Orden said — mostly out of a concern that weevils, scabs and other pests could enter U.S. orchards from imported products. The trade agreement opened the door for the incremental expansion of avocados.

In establishing a system in which U.S. inspectors verify that avocados are pest-free — from when they are growing in orchards to the moment they are packed into sealed trucks — Mexico has been allowed to ship its agricultural product. It started with an approved wintertime stock in Alaska back in the ’90s that has turned into a current year-long supply in all states.

“So that’s all very encouraging and great story about growth and trade agreements, and something the U.S. is trying to do in other countries as well,” Orden said.

The agreement has contributed to economic progress in both sides of the border. Last year, “the two-way food and agricultural trade reached \$65 billion, including \$2.8 billion in Mexican avocado exports to the United States,” U.S. Ambassador to Mexico Ken Salazar said [in a statement](#). In Michoacán, some 300,000 workers depend on the avocado industry — including those doing the picking, the packing and the transporting of the fruit.

But their livelihoods have been threatened by encumbering cartels, who see the booming industry as a golden hen for profit, Orden said.

“It has attracted the attention of these gangs in an area where the cartels are not under control,” he said. “That’s where this story takes on a shadier color. But that’s really a law enforcement issue, and one that affects all of our relationships with Mexico.”

The USDA’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service said in a statement that it had worked with the Mexican government and the Association of Avocado Exporting Producers and Packers of Mexico to enact “additional measures” to safeguard the safety of its inspectors.

While the agency did not disclose what such measures encompass, they served to avert what could have been a costly avocado crisis — one that would have impacted plenty, from those picking the fruit to those biting into their avocado toasts.

“With this we ensure the exportation of fruit and provide economic certainty to farmers and day laborers,” Michoacán Gov. Alfredo Ramírez Bedolla [tweeted](#) Friday.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	02/18 Bike helmet rule dropped: racial justice
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/18/us/seattle-bicycle-helmet.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/18/us/seattle-bicycle-helmet.html</a>



In Seattle, home to one of the largest populations of bike commuters in the country, officials have overturned a decades-old regulation requiring cyclists to wear helmets because of discriminatory enforcement of the rule against homeless people and people of color.

The King County Board of Health voted to repeal the requirement on Thursday, with only one member opposing the decision to roll back a measure that even critics acknowledge has saved lives.

“The question before us yesterday wasn’t the efficacy of helmets,” said Girmay Zahilay, a board member who is also a member of the King County Council. “The question before us was whether a helmet law that’s enforced by police on balance produces results that outweigh the harm that that law creates.”

Seattle is the [largest city in the country](#) to enforce a bike helmet requirement. The city of [Tacoma, Wash.](#), repealed its requirement in 2020, citing similar equity concerns, [as did Dallas](#) in 2014 for those 18 and older, as a means of encouraging more bike-sharing.

In a county that has made racial justice reform a priority — the King County health board [declared racism a public health crisis in 2020](#) — the regulation pitted the need to address racial equity against the obvious safety benefits of helmets.

“We have to have a broad view of public health: Yes, we have to think about brain injury, and we also have to think about the impact on our criminal legal system,” Mr. Zahilay said.

The board of health, made up of elected officials and appointed medical experts from across the county, began to scrutinize the helmet rule in 2020 after an [analysis of court records](#) from Crosscut, a local news site, showed that it was rarely enforced, and enforced disproportionately when it was. Since 2017, Seattle police had given just 117 helmet citations, over 40 percent of which went to people who were homeless. Since 2019, 60 percent of citations went to people who were homeless.

A [separate analysis](#) from Central Seattle Greenways, a safe streets advocacy group, found that Black cyclists were almost four times as likely to receive a citation for violating the helmet requirement as white cyclists. Native American cyclists were just over twice as likely to receive one as white cyclists.

Neither study looked at whether homeless people or people of color wore helmets less frequently than other groups — or whether, out of economic necessity, they were more likely to ride a bike. Critics nonetheless said enforcement appeared to be discriminatory.

“It was a law that really just allowed the Police Department, the Seattle Police Department, to harass Black and brown community members,” said K.L. Shannon, an organizer for Seattle Neighborhood Greenways and police accountability chair for the Seattle King County chapter of the N.A.A.C.P.

Ms. Shannon’s nephew was just 8 years old when he and three friends were stopped by an officer a few blocks from their houses for not wearing helmets, Ms. Shannon said. She said the officer accused them of stealing the bikes.

“Until this day my nephew doesn’t ride a bike,” Ms. Shannon said. “He’s never forgotten that.”

In an incident in 2016, a Black man was stopped by the Seattle police for riding a bike with no helmet. In a [dashcam video](#) of the tense, 19-minute stop, one officer shared with another that the suspect “matches the description of a burglary suspect,” suggesting that the helmet regulation was used as a pretense.

In 2019, Daniel Oakes was stopped for not wearing his helmet while riding his bicycle on a sidewalk near a homeless encampment and then charged with an unrelated offense. A judge [dismissed the case](#) after Mr. Oakes’s lawyer argued that the helmet requirement had been unconstitutionally used as a pretext to make the stop.



In a statement to Crosscut in response to its analysis of bike stop data, a Seattle Police Department spokesman, Randall Huserik, said the traffic stops were often used to educate riders about the benefits of wearing a helmet.

“The focus is the behavior, not the status,” he said. “A risk of serious brain injury/death remains just as dire for someone experiencing homelessness as it does for someone who is housed — that is the risk these citations are intended to mitigate.”

Last month, the department announced that it would no longer use bicycle helmet infractions — along with a few other low-risk safety violations — as primary reasons for a traffic stop.

As the largest city in King County, Seattle is the biggest jurisdiction affected by the rollback. Seventeen jurisdictions outside Seattle — making up just over one-third of the county’s population — have their own mandates requiring helmet use and will not be affected by Thursday’s vote.

Opponents of the repeal have warned that it could have serious safety consequences.

“No helmets means more death and more serious injury,” said Richard Adler, a lawyer who works with clients who have suffered brain injuries. “Access to helmets is already an issue, and repealing this disincentivizes everybody to not wear their helmet over time.”

Helmets reduce the likelihood of serious head injury by 60 percent, according to [the National Transportation Safety Board](#). In cases where it was known whether cyclists were wearing helmets, 79 percent of those who were fatally injured in bike crashes between 2010 and 2017 were not wearing them.

Advocates for the repeal said they believed that people would continue to wear helmets even in the absence of a legal requirement.

When the requirement was first enacted in 1993, helmet use was not widespread, said Joe McDermott, a board member who voted in favor of the repeal. But times have changed, he said.

“The law and the public education around creating the law helped change behaviors and norms,” Mr. McDermott said. “And 30 years later it’s essential that we do re-evaluate our intended purposes when we adopted the helmet law and the unintended consequences of having it in place.”

Helmet use in the city is as high as 91 percent among private bike riders, [according to one study](#). In nearby Portland, Ore., advocates for repeal noted, [use is similarly high](#), despite the fact that the city does not have an all-ages helmet law.

Access to helmets is a particular challenge for low-income people: according to a study from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, people in the lowest income bracket were about half as likely to wear a helmet for all rides as people in the highest income bracket.

But Mr. McDermott said he doubted that those disparities accounted for the extent of the disproportionate enforcement of the rule. And he said the county could address the disparities without policing: The county recently budgeted more than \$200,000 to buy helmets and expand education on bike safety.

Across the country, other kinds of biking regulations have also been found to be enforced in discriminatory ways.

In Chicago, a study found that tickets were issued to cyclists eight times more often in majority-Black parts of the city. [An investigation](#) by the U.S. Department of Justice found that 73 percent of bicycle stops in Tampa, Fla., between 2014 and 2015 involved Black cyclists, despite the fact that Black people made up 26 percent of the population.

“The data revealed that the stops did not reduce crime or produce any other positive outcome,” such as reducing bike crashes or injuries, the report said.

“The best investments to keep people safe while riding bikes is creating safe streets, safer transportation systems,” said Bill Nesper, director of the League of American Bicyclists. “Those are the types of investments that are going to keep people walking and biking safest in our communities, instead of investing in laws like this that could be a barrier to people riding bikes and that may be enforced in a discretionary and discriminatory way.”

[Return to Top](#)

## Cyber Awareness

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	02/22 New banking Trojans detected: 97,000
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.zdnet.com/article/almost-100000-new-mobile-banking-trojans-detected-in-2021/">https://www.zdnet.com/article/almost-100000-new-mobile-banking-trojans-detected-in-2021/</a>
GIST	<p>Researchers have found almost 100,000 new variants of mobile banking Trojans in just a year.</p> <p>As our digital lives have begun to center more on handsets rather than just desktop PCs, many malware developers have shifted part of their focus to the creation of mobile threats.</p> <p>Many of the traditional infection routes are still workable – including phishing and the download and execution of suspicious software – but cyberattackers are also known to infiltrate official app stores, including Google Play, to lure handset owners into downloading software that appears to be trustworthy.</p> <p>This technique is often associated with the distribution of Remote Access Trojans (RATs). While Google maintains security barriers to stop malicious apps from being hosted in its store, there are methods to quietly circumvent these controls.</p> <p>In 2021, for example, Malwarebytes found an app in Google Play disguised as a useful <a href="#">barcode scanner</a> with over 10 million active installs. While the app was submitted as legitimate software, an update was issued to the software after it had accumulated a huge user base turning the app into an aggressive adware nuisance.</p> <p>The same tactic can be used to turn seemingly benign apps <a href="#">into banking Trojans</a> designed to steal your financial data and account credentials from online services. In the mobile world, theft can occur by redirecting users to phishing pages or by performing overlay attacks, in which a phishing window covers a banking app's display. Trojans may also quietly sign up their victims to premium telephone services.</p> <p>Recent examples of Trojans ending up in Google Play <a href="#">include Joker</a> and Facestealer.</p> <p>According to new research <a href="#">published by Kaspersky</a>, 97,661 new mobile banking Trojan variants were detected in 2021, alongside 17,372 new mobile ransomware Trojans and a total of 3,464,756 malicious installation packages, .APKs that can be installed on jailbroken devices or those that accept apps from unknown developers.</p> <p>The banking Trojans responsible for the most detected attacks over 2021 were Trojan-Banker.AndroidOS.Agent, Trojan-Banker.AndroidOS.Anubis, and Trojan-Banker.AndroidOS.Svpeng.</p> <p>Residents of Japan, Spain, Turkey, France, Australia, Germany, Norway, Italy, Croatia, and Austria are most commonly targeted by mobile banking Trojans.</p> <p>Kaspersky says that after a steep climb in the number of attacks detected in 2020, banking Trojan rates are now on the decline.</p>

	The cybersecurity researchers added that there is a "downward" trend on mobile attacks in general, but "attacks are becoming more sophisticated in terms of both malware functionality and vectors."
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>02/21 Payment card skimming reemerges w/twist</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.scmagazine.com/analysis/cybercrime/payment-card-skimming-reemerges-with-an-online-twist">https://www.scmagazine.com/analysis/cybercrime/payment-card-skimming-reemerges-with-an-online-twist</a>
GIST	<p>Card skimming has been around since before the mainstream internet and is undergoing a renaissance as financial fraudsters are recognizing new opportunities to combine physical world data theft with online intrusion to steal even more money and information than before.</p> <p>Just a week ago, it was reported that roughly <a href="#">500 online retail sites</a> fell prey to a massive “card skimming” <a href="#">incident</a>, wherein bad actors installed a device that allowed them to copy and swipe the data off legitimate debit and credit card as they were being used for payments. In the past, card skimming thieves would insert a physical device into ATMs or payment terminals that would hijack the information off of valid customers’ payment cards.</p> <p>Nowadays, as online shopping is booming more than ever, these cyber thieves are using malware inserted onto the checkout page of online commerce sites to collect the card information, which they can resell or use in their own nefarious schemes.</p> <p>Malware and vulnerability detection company Sansec, which works with more than 7,000 online retailers, was one of the first to spot this malicious card skimming activity earlier this month. The vendor recommends “cleansing” the retail sites that have been affected, in order to root out the malicious code, but experts fear that these cyber-skimmers will simply shift their approach and find “backdoors” through which they can implement their viruses. The <a href="#">Magecart group</a> of cybercriminals has been seen at the heart of many of these new card-skimming attacks, as well as other card information theft schemes where the card is not physically present at the time of purchase.</p> <p>Furthermore, this problem could become more exacerbated as mobile phones begin to add card readers, too. Card swipe or dip devices for physically reading payment card chips have long been an ancillary add-on for mobile devices — making them useful as payment terminals. But Apple announced earlier this month that it will be adding <a href="#">a new “Tap to Pay” feature</a> that would allow users to make contactless card payments between iPhones without adding any additional hardware dongles.</p> <p>But financial institutions, payments companies and retailers who are impacted by these skimming attacks are not taking this lying down. Earlier this month, <a href="#">Target</a>, which has in the past made headlines as the victim of cyber intrusion, has released its own “web-skimming detection tool” as an open-source tool aimed at detecting malicious code that bad actors have inserted to grab payment card information online.</p> <p>Dubbed “<a href="#">Merry Maker</a>,” the retailer is promoting this technology as “a proactive defense... to defend against digital skimming,” according to the Target.com website. The technology has been used as a client-side “scanner” at Target’s website for more than three years.</p> <p>“Merry Maker continually simulates online browsing and completes test transactions to scan for the presence of malicious code,” according to a Target blog post about the release of the open-source tool.</p> <p>“Merry Maker acts like a guest on Target.com by completing several typical activities including online purchases. While doing so, the tool gathers and analyzes a variety of information including network requests, JavaScript files, and browser activity to determine if there’s any type of unwanted activity.”</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>02/18 Carpet bombing attacks on the rise</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/carpet-bombing-attacks-on-the-rise/">https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/carpet-bombing-attacks-on-the-rise/</a>
GIST	Carpet bombing Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks are on the rise, according to new <a href="#">research</a> by cloud-oriented security services provider, <a href="#">Neustar Security Services</a> .

On Thursday, Neustar published its [Cyber Threats & Trends Report: Defending Against A New Cybercrime Economy](#), which analyzed cyber-attacks fielded by the company's Security Operations Center (SOC) last year.

The company said the number of carpet bombing DDoS attacks seen by its SOC in 2021 was "unprecedented."

"Carpet bombing, in which a DDoS attack targets multiple IP addresses of an organization within a very short time, accounted for 44% of total attacks last year, but the disparity between the first and second half of 2021 was stark," said a Neustar spokesperson.

The company found that in the first two quarters of 2021, carpet bombing represented just over a third (34%) of total attacks mitigated by the SOC. However, this form of DDoS attack became more prevalent in the second half of the year, accounting for 60% of all attacks in Q3, and 56% in Q4.

Most of the attacks were small, falling into the 25 gigabits per second (Gbps) and under size category. While the average attack was just 4.9 Gbps last year, many large-scale attacks occurred in 2021, with the largest of all boasting a bandwidth of 1.3 terabits per second (Tbps).

The most intense carpet bombing attack was clocked at 369 million packets per second (Mpps). Researchers noted that while "the majority of attacks were over in minutes," the longest-running attack dragged on for nine days, 22 hours and 42 minutes.

Nearly 40% of the unique attacks seen by the SOC in 2021 took place in the first three months of the year. While a mix of old and new attack vectors was observed, the SOC noted the continuing use of botnets.

The SOC also saw a high level of reflection/amplification DDoS attacks, using either new vectors or familiar tactics, such as DNS and Remote Desktop Protocol (RDP).

The company said: "Single vector attacks represented 54% of attacks in 2021 compared to 5% in 2020, showing an economy of effort from many attackers."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	<b>02/19 CISA list: free cybersecurity tools, services</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/cisa-compiles-list-of-free-cybersecurity-tools-and-services/">https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/cisa-compiles-list-of-free-cybersecurity-tools-and-services/</a>
GIST	<p>The U.S. Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) has published a list of free cybersecurity services and tools to help organizations increase their security capabilities and better defend against cyberattacks.</p> <p>While the set is neither comprehensive nor impervious to change, it aims to mature an entity's cybersecurity risk management when combined with baseline security practices for a strong cybersecurity program.</p> <p>The list is a mix of services from CISA, open-source utilities, and free tools and services from organizations in the public and private sectors.</p> <p><b>Build on a strong foundation</b></p> <p>Before turning to the tools and services compiled by CISA, organizations need to adopt some of its recommended security practices:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Apply security updates that fix <a href="#">known vulnerabilities</a></li><li>• Implement multi-factor authentication (MFA)</li><li>• Quit using software that is no longer supported (end-of-life) and replace systems/software with passwords that are known, default, or hard-coded</li></ul>

- Use CISA's Cyber Hygiene Vulnerability Scanning service (register at [vulnerability@cisa.dhs.gov](mailto:vulnerability@cisa.dhs.gov))

Reduce visibility on the public web for sensitive devices and platforms ([get your stuff off search](#))

Once the above measures are implemented, CISA [says](#) that organizations can move to use the free tools and services it compiled to improve their cybersecurity risk management.

The agency has grouped the resources into [four categories](#), based on the objectives that need to be met to protect against potential critical threats:

1. Reducing the likelihood of a damaging cyber incident
2. Detecting malicious activity quickly
3. Responding effectively to confirmed incidents
4. Maximizing resilience

The list includes 97 tools and services from the open-source space as well as from CISA's repository and various organizations relevant to the cybersecurity sector: Microsoft, Google, VMware, IBM, Mandiant, Cisco, Secureworks, Cloudflare, Center for Internet Security, CrowdStrike, Tenable, AT&T Cybersecurity, Kali Linux Project, Splunk, SANS, and Palo Alto Networks.

Each entry comes with a brief description, a link, and an assessment of the skill level required to handle it, which varies between "basic" and "advanced."

CISA agency highlights that the listed tools and services are not guaranteed to be suitable "for any particular use case."

Although many of the resources listed are from private companies, CISA notes that selecting them in no way implies endorsement or favoring by the agency.

[Return to Top](#)

Click on link for CISA Free Cybersecurity Services and Tools: <https://www.cisa.gov/free-cybersecurity-services-and-tools>

HEADLINE	<b>02/21 Cookware giant Meyer discloses attack</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/cookware-giant-meyer-discloses-cyberattack-that-impacted-employees/">https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/cookware-giant-meyer-discloses-cyberattack-that-impacted-employees/</a>
GIST	<p>Meyer Corporation, the largest cookware distributor in the U.S., and the second-largest globally, has informed U.S. Attorney General offices of a data breach affecting thousands of its employees.</p> <p>According to the notification letter shared with the U.S. Attorney General offices of Maine and California, Meyer fell victim to a cyberattack on October 25, 2021.</p> <p>In response, the firm launched an investigation that was concluded on December 1, 2021, revealing that threat actors gained access to personal information belonging to employees of Meyer and its subsidiaries.</p> <p>"On or around December 1, 2021, our investigation identified potential unauthorized access to Meyer employee information [including employees of Meyer's subsidiaries Hestan Commercial Corporation, Hestan Smart Cooking, Hestan Vineyards, and Blue Mountain Enterprises, LLC]," explains the Meyer data breach notification.</p> <p>The personal information that may have been exposed and copied by the threat actors include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full names</li> <li>• Physical address</li> <li>• Date of birth</li> <li>• Gender</li> <li>• Ethnicity</li> </ul>

- Social Security number
- Health insurance information
- Medical condition
- Random drug screening results
- COVID vaccination cards
- Driver's license
- Passports
- Government ID number
- Permanent resident cards
- Immigration status information
- Information on dependents

"Meyer takes the protection of its employees' personal information seriously. Meyer is offering two years of identity protection services, at no cost, to affected employees and their dependents," concludes the [data breach notification](#) sent to impacted employees.

#### **Conti behind Meyer's cyberattack**

While Meyer's announcement doesn't provide details regarding the cyberattack that resulted in the disclosed data breach, we found a relevant listing on the Conti extortion site dating to November 7, 2021.

The Meyer entry on Conti's portal offers a ZIP file containing 2% of the data allegedly stolen by the ransomware gang during the cyberattack.

However, the notorious ransomware group hasn't followed up to publish the remainder 98% in the months that followed, either an indication of their willingness to negotiate indefinitely or due to losing interest.

In either case, now that Meyer has gone public about the incident and offered identity protection services to the affected individuals, there can be no resolution that benefits the malicious actors.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	<b>02/21 Revamped CryptBot: pirated software sites</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/revamped-cryptbot-malware-spread-by-pirated-software-sites/">https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/revamped-cryptbot-malware-spread-by-pirated-software-sites/</a>
GIST	<p>A new version of the CryptBot info stealer was seen in distribution via multiple websites that offer free downloads of cracks for games and pro-grade software.</p> <p>CryptBot is a Windows malware that steals information from infected devices, including saved browser credentials, cookies, browser history, cryptocurrency wallets, credit cards, and files.</p> <p>The latest version features new capabilities and optimizations, while the malware authors have also deleted several older functions to make their tool leaner and more efficient.</p> <p>Security analysts at Ahn Lab reported that the threat actors are constantly refreshing their C2, dropper sites, and the malware itself, so CryptBot is currently one of the most shifting malicious operations.</p> <p><b>Using search results for delivery</b></p> <p>According to the Ahn Lab report, the CryptBot threat actors distribute malware through websites pretending to offer software cracks, key generators, or other utilities.</p> <p>To gain wide visibility, the threat actors utilize search engine optimization to rank the malware distribution sites at the top of Google search results, providing a stable stream of prospective victims.</p> <p>According to screenshots shared of the malware distribution sites, the threat actors use both custom domains or websites hosted on Amazon AWS.</p>



The malicious websites are constantly being refreshed, so there's a wide variety of ever-shifting lures to draw users onto the malware distribution sites.

Visitors of these sites are taken through a series of redirections before they end up on the delivery page, so the landing page could be on a compromised legitimate site abused for SEO poisoning attacks.

We have seen the same malware operators using [fake VPN sites](#) to deliver CryptBot to victims in previous years, so search engine abuse isn't a new trick.

### Features removed

Fresh samples of CryptBot indicate that its authors want to simplify its functionality and make the malware lighter, leaner, and less likely to be detected.

In this context, the anti-sandbox routine has been removed, leaving only the anti-VM CPU core count check in the newest version.

Also, the redundant second C2 connection and second exfiltration folder were both removed, and the new variant only features a single info-stealing C2.

"The code shows that when sending files, the method of manually adding the sent file data to the header was changed to the method that uses simple API. user-agent value when sending was also modified," explains [ASEC's report](#)

"The previous version calls the function twice to send each to a different C2, but in the changed version, one C2 URL is hard-coded in the function."

Another feature the CryptBot's authors have scrapped is the screenshot function and the option of collecting data on TXT files on the desktop, which were too risky and perhaps easily detected during exfiltration.

### Works on all Chrome versions

On the other hand, the latest version of CryptBot brings some targeted additions and improvements that make it a lot more potent.

In [previous versions](#), the malware could only successfully exfiltrate data when deployed against Chrome versions between 81 and 95.

This limitation arose from implementing a system that looked for user data in fixed file paths, and if the paths were different, the malware returned an error.

Now, it searches on all file paths, and if user data is found anywhere, it exfiltrates them regardless of the Chrome version.

Considering that Google rolled out chrome 96 in November 2021, CryptBot remained ineffective against most of its targets for roughly three months, so fixing this problem was well overdue for its operators.

As CryptBot primarily targets people searching for software cracks, warez, and other methods of defeating copyright protection, simply avoiding the downloading of these tools will prevent infection by this malware and many others.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	02/21 Expeditors shuts down after cyberattack
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/expeditors-shuts-down-global-operations-after-likely-ransomware-attack/">https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/expeditors-shuts-down-global-operations-after-likely-ransomware-attack/</a>



<p><b>GIST</b></p>	<p>Seattle-based logistics and freight forwarding company Expeditors International has been targeted in a cyberattack over the weekend that forced the organization to shut down most of its operations worldwide.</p> <p>With annual gross revenue of around \$10 billion, Expeditors has 350 locations and over 18,000 employees worldwide, providing critical logistics solutions for its customers. Its services include supply chain, warehousing and distribution, transportation, customs and compliance.</p> <p>The company does not mention the type of cyberattack but from its description and an anonymous tip to BleepingComputer, it looks like a massive ransomware incident.</p> <p><b>Widespread cyberattack</b></p> <p>At 9:20 AM EST Sunday morning, BleepingComputer received an anonymous tip saying that Expeditors suffered a large ransomware attack.</p> <p>While we could not independently verify the attack, soon after Expeditors published a short notification at around noon (EST time) on Sunday announcing a global systems downtime after shutting down operations due to a targeted cyberattack.</p> <p>In a subsequent press release on Sunday night, the company <a href="#">reiterated</a> that the cyberattack forced it to shut down most of its operating systems globally, to maintain “the safety of our overall global systems environment.”</p> <p>The impact is significant, as Expeditors is limited in its operations, which include freight, customs, and distribution activities, which could cause shipments of its customers to stagnate.</p> <p>Systems will continue to be offline until they can be securely restored from backups, the company notes. At the same time, the company is looking for solutions with its carriers and service providers to minimize the impact on customers. However, there is no estimation of when operations will resume.</p> <p>A global team of cybersecurity experts is currently investigating the attack and helping the business restart activity.</p> <p>Although Expeditors did not mention the nature of the incident, they were likely hit by ransomware, as shutting down operations globally and restoring them from backups is usually a course of action prompted by network-wide encryption.</p> <p>The company says that it will cover all expenses for investigating the cyberattack and for its remediation, which are expected to extend for a larger period.</p> <p>Furthermore, Expeditors describes the incident as a “significant event” that “could have a material adverse impact on our business, revenues, results of operations and reputation.”</p> <p>Although it cannot be estimated when Expeditors International’s business will return to normal, the company says that it will provide updates when it is “able to do so confidently.”</p>
<p><a href="#">Return to Top</a></p>	

<p><b>HEADLINE</b></p>	<p><b>02/18 Conti ransomware gang takes over TrickBot</b></p>
<p><b>SOURCE</b></p>	<p><a href="https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/conti-ransomware-gang-takes-over-trickbot-malware-operation/">https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/conti-ransomware-gang-takes-over-trickbot-malware-operation/</a></p>
<p><b>GIST</b></p>	<p>After four years of activity and numerous takedown attempts, the death knell of TrickBot has sounded as its top members move under new management, the Conti ransomware syndicate, who plan to replace it with the stealthier BazarBackdoor malware.</p>

TrickBot is a Windows malware platform that uses multiple modules for various malicious activities, including information stealing, password stealing, infiltrating Windows domains, initial access to networks, and malware delivery.

TrickBot has dominated the malware threat landscape since 2016, partnering with ransomware gangs and causing havoc on millions of devices worldwide.

The Ryuk ransomware gang initially partnered with TrickBot for initial access to works, but were replaced by Conti Ransomware gang who has been using the malware for the past year to gain access to corporate networks.

It is estimated that the group handling TrickBot campaigns - an elite division known by the name Overdose, has made at least \$200 million from its operations.

### **Conti takes over TrickBot operation**

Researchers at cybercrime and adversarial disruption company Advanced Intelligence ([AdvIntel](#)) noticed that in 2021 Conti had become the only beneficiary of TrickBot's supply of high-quality network accesses. By this time, TrickBot's core team of developers had already created a stealthier piece of malware, [BazarBackdoor](#), used primarily for remote access into valuable corporate networks where ransomware could be deployed.

As the TrickBot trojan had become easily detectable by antivirus vendors, the threat actors began switching to BazarBackdoor for initial access to networks as it was developed specifically to stealthily [compromise high-value targets](#).

However, by the end of 2021, Conti managed to attract "multiple elite developers and managers" of the TrickBot botnet, turning the operation into its subsidiary rather than a partner, AdvIntel notes in a report shared with BleepingComputer.

Based on internal Conti conversations that the researchers had access to and shared with BleepingComputer, AdvIntel says that BazarBackdoor moved from being part of TrickBot's toolkit to a standalone tool whose development is controlled by the Conti ransomware syndicate.

The main admin for the Conti group said that they took over TrickBot. However, as the "bot is dead" they are moving Conti from TrickBot to BazarBackdoor as the primary way of gaining initial access.

Ever since its launch, the Conti operation maintained a code of conduct that allowed it to rise as one of the most resilient and lucrative ransomware groups, unfazed by [law enforcement crackdowns on its competitors](#).

AdvIntel says that the group was able to run their normal cybercriminal business by adopting a "trust-based, team-based" model instead of working with random affiliates that would cause action from law enforcement due to the organizations they hit.

While TrickBot malware detections will become less common, AdvIntel's recent findings show that the operation is not finished and it just moved to a new control group that takes it to the next level with malware better suited for high-value targets.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	02/21 Open source appeal for cyber crooks
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.darkreading.com/vulnerabilities-threats/open-source-code-the-next-major-wave-of-cyberattacks">https://www.darkreading.com/vulnerabilities-threats/open-source-code-the-next-major-wave-of-cyberattacks</a>
GIST	Open source software is ubiquitous. It has become an unequalled driver of technological innovation because organizations that use it don't have to reinvent the wheel for common software components.

However, the ubiquity of [open source](#) software also presents a significant security risk, as it opens the door for vulnerabilities to be introduced (intentionally or inadvertently) to the consumers of open source software products. The recent race to address major vulnerabilities in the widely used Log4j code library is the biggest sign yet that risks within the open source software environment must be addressed.

#### The Open Source Appeal for Cybercriminals

The open source attack method is appealing to bad actors because it can be widespread and highly effective. Attackers can use various methods to obfuscate malicious changes contributed to open source projects, and the rigor in reviewing code for security implications can vary widely across projects. Without stringent controls in place to detect these malicious changes, they may go unnoticed until after they've been distributed and included in software across numerous companies.

Attacks on open source code can vary in size and the entities they affect. For example, last July, researchers found [nine vulnerabilities affecting three open source projects](#) — EspoCRM, Pimcore, and Akaunting — which are frequently leveraged by small and midsize businesses. What's more, the 2017 Equifax data breach, which affected the personal data of [147 million people](#) as a result of a vulnerability in the organization's open source code, is a clear example of how vulnerabilities can be exploited by bad actors and create damaging effects throughout.

#### Never Going to Give You Up

CISA has said that hundreds of millions of devices were likely [affected by the Log4j vulnerability](#). Given the magnitude of this incident, many enterprises are likely analyzing whether to leverage open source code for future developments.

However, forgoing open source altogether isn't realistic. All modern software is built from open source components, and rebuilding those components without open source would require massive investments in time and money to produce even minor applications. Over [60% of websites](#) worldwide run on Apache and Nginx servers, and [90% of IT leaders](#) reportedly use enterprise open source code regularly.

#### Testing and Protecting Your Software

Instead of avoiding open source, a more realistic approach is for security and software teams to work together to develop policies and a process for testing applications and software components. Organizations should think about this as a three-part process. It requires scanning and testing code, establishing a clear-cut process for addressing and fixing vulnerabilities as they arise, and creating an internal policy in which rules are set for addressing security issues.

When it comes to testing the resilience of your open source environment with tools, static code analysis is a good first step. Still, organizations must remember that this is only the first layer of testing. Static analysis refers to analyzing the source code before the actual software application or program goes live and addressing any discovered vulnerabilities. However, static analysis cannot detect all malicious threats that could be embedded in open source code. Additional testing in a sandbox environment should be the next step. Stringent code reviews, dynamic code analysis, and unit testing are other methods that can be leveraged. (Dynamic analysis refers to examining the software program while it's currently running to identify vulnerabilities.)

After scanning is complete, organizations must have a clear process to address any discovered vulnerabilities. Developers may be finding themselves against a release deadline, or the software patch may require refactoring the entire program and put a strain on timelines. This process should help developers address tough choices to protect the organization's security by giving clear next steps for addressing vulnerabilities and mitigating issues.

The policy-change step should create a documented plan for how all decisions will be made moving forward and which stakeholders should be involved throughout the process. Additionally, organizations can implement multiple controls for their open source components, such as certification and accreditation programs. However, remember that this will add additional overhead costs and slow down the development of open source projects.

## Defending Open Source Against Future Attacks

The industry at large is taking note of the need to further protect open source code. The Linux Foundation announced in October it [raised \\$10 million alongside other industry leaders](#) to identify and fix cybersecurity vulnerabilities in open source software and develop improved tooling, training, research, and vulnerability disclosure practices.

In addition to industrywide efforts to protect software built on open source code against cyber threats, organizations must also take an internal proactive approach to their defense strategy. This should include implementing testing and control procedures for both their own code and the open source code on which they rely. Organizations must also develop internal policies and guidelines that recognize the risks from using open source software and identify the controls to be used to manage that risk. Doing so will allow them to continue leveraging the benefits of open source code while creating an environment that is resilient against future attacks.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	<b>02/21 Xenomorph banking trojan targets Europe</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://thehackernews.com/2022/02/xenomorph-android-banking.html?&amp;web_view=true">https://thehackernews.com/2022/02/xenomorph-android-banking.html?&amp;web_view=true</a>
GIST	<p>A new Android banking trojan with over 50,000 installations has been observed distributed via the official Google Play Store with the goal of targeting 56 European banks and carrying out harvesting sensitive information from compromised devices.</p> <p>Dubbed <a href="#">Xenomorph</a> by Dutch security firm ThreatFabric, the in-development malware is said to share overlaps with another banking trojan tracked under the moniker Alien while also being "radically different" from its predecessor in terms of the functionalities offered.</p> <p>"Despite being a work-in-progress, Xenomorph is already sporting effective overlays and being actively distributed on official app stores," ThreatFabric's founder and CEO, Han Sahin, said. "In addition, it features a very detailed and modular engine to abuse accessibility services, which in the future could power very advanced capabilities, like ATS."</p> <p>Alien, a remote access trojan (RAT) with notification sniffing and authenticator-based 2FA theft features, <a href="#">emerged shortly</a> after the demise of the infamous <a href="#">Cerberus</a> malware in August 2020. Since then, other forks of Cerberus have been spotted in the wild, including <a href="#">ERMAC</a> in September 2021. Xenomorph, like Alien and ERMAC, is yet another example of an Android banking trojan that's focused on circumventing Google Play Store's security protections by masquerading as productivity apps such as "Fast Cleaner" to trick unaware victims into installing the malware.</p> <p>It's worth noting that a fitness training dropper app with over 10,000 installations — dubbed <a href="#">GymDrop</a> — was found delivering the Alien banking trojan payload in November by masking it as a "new package of workout exercises."</p> <p>Fast Cleaner, which has the package name "vizeeva.fast.cleaner" and continues to be available on the app store, has been most popular in Portugal and Spain, data from mobile app market intelligence firm Sensor Tower <a href="#">reveals</a>, with the app making its first appearance in the Play Store towards the end of January 2022.</p> <p>What's more, reviews for the app from users come with warnings that "this app has malware" and that it "ask[s] for an update to be confirmed continuously." Another user said: "It puts malware on the device and apart from that it has a self-protection system so that you cannot uninstall it."</p> <p>Also put to use by Xenomorph is the <a href="#">time-tested tactic</a> of prompting the victims to grant it Accessibility Service privileges and abuse the permissions to conduct overlay attacks, wherein the malware injects rogue login screens atop targeted apps from Spain, Portugal, Italy, and Belgium to siphon credentials and other personal information.</p>

Additionally, it's equipped with a notification interception feature to extract two-factor authentication tokens received via SMS, and get the list of installed apps, the results of which are exfiltrated to a remote command-and-control server.

"The surfacing of Xenomorph shows, once again, that threat actors are focusing their attention on landing applications on official markets," the researchers said. "Modern Banking malware is evolving at a very fast rate, and criminals are starting to adopt more refined development practices to support future updates."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	02/21 Mobile malware evolution 2021
SOURCE	<a href="https://securelist.com/mobile-malware-evolution-2021/105876/?web_view=true">https://securelist.com/mobile-malware-evolution-2021/105876/?web_view=true</a>
GIST	<p><b>Figures of the year</b></p> <p>In 2021, Kaspersky mobile products and technologies detected:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 3,464,756 malicious installation packages</li><li>• 97,661 new mobile banking Trojans</li><li>• 17,372 new mobile ransomware Trojans</li></ul> <p><b>Trends of the year</b></p> <p>In 2021, we observed a downward trend in the number of attacks on mobile users. But it is too early to celebrate: attacks are becoming more sophisticated in terms of both malware functionality and vectors. Last year saw repeat incidents of malicious code injection into popular apps through ad SDKs, as in the sensational case of <a href="#">CamScanner</a> — we found malicious code inside ad libraries in <a href="#">the official APKPure client</a>, as well as in <a href="#">a modified WhatsApp build</a>.</p> <p>Experts also continued to find malware in apps on Google Play, despite Google's efforts to keep threats off the platform. Especially notable in 2021 were the Joker Trojan, which signs victims up to paid subscriptions, the Facestealer Trojan, which steals credentials from Facebook accounts, and various banking Trojan loaders. The most common way to sneak malware onto Google Play is for a Trojan to mimic a legitimate app already published on the site (for example, a photo editor or a VPN service) with the addition of a small piece of code to decrypt and launch a payload from the Trojan's body or download it from the attackers' server. Often, to complicate dynamic analysis, unpacking actions are performed through commands from the attackers' server and in several steps: each decrypted module contains the address of the next one, plus instructions for decrypting it.</p> <p>Besides apps with actual malicious functionality, there are various scamming apps on Google Play — for example, ones that imitate services where you can apply for welfare payments and redirect the user to a page asking for their data and payment of a fee.</p> <p>Banking Trojans acquired new capabilities in 2021. The Fakecalls banker, which targets Korean users, drops outgoing calls to the victim's bank and plays pre-recorded operator responses stored in the Trojan's body. The Sova banker steals <a href="#">cookies</a>, enabling attackers to access the user's current session and personal mobile banking account without knowing the login credentials. The Vultur backdoor uses VNC (Virtual Network Computing) to record the smartphone screen; when the user opens an app that is of interest to attackers, they can monitor the on-screen events.</p> <p>Another interesting find in 2021 was the first <a href="#">Gamethief-type mobile Trojan</a> aimed at stealing account credentials for the mobile version of PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds (PUBG).</p> <p>After 2020, which was full of newsbreaks and opportunities for masking malware, for example, as Covid19 trackers or video conferencing apps, the pandemic topic gradually faded in the reporting year. There were no new global cybercriminal trends. Of the few examples of exploiting a trending topic was the Joker Trojan on Google Play, which masquerades as an app with a background wallpaper in the style of Squid Game.</p>

Speaking of mobile threats, we cannot fail to mention the high-profile investigation of [the Pegasus spyware](#). Because protection against such programs is quite a live issue, we drew up [some recommendations](#) on how to guard against advanced spyware (or, at any rate, greatly complicate the intruder's task).

## Statistics

### Number of installation package

In 2021, we detected 3,464,756 mobile malicious installation packages, down 2,218,938 from the previous year. Overall, the number of mobile malware installation packages dropped to around 2019 levels.

*Number of detected malicious installation packages, 2018–2021 ([download](#))*

### Number of attacks on mobile users

The number of attacks fell smoothly throughout the reporting period, reaching in H2 2021 the lowest monthly average in the past two years.

*Number of attacks on mobile users, 2019–2021 ([download](#))*

## Geography of mobile threats

### Map of infection attempts by mobile malware, 2021 ([download](#))

Top 10 countries by share of users attacked by mobile malware

	Country*	% **
1	Iran	40.22
2	China	28.86
3	Saudi Arabia	27.99
4	Algeria	24.49
5	India	20.91
6	Iraq	19.65
7	Yemen	19.26
8	Oman	17.89
9	Kuwait	17.30
10	Morocco	17.09

\* Excluded from the rating are countries with relatively few users of Kaspersky mobile technologies (under 10,000).

\*\* Unique users attacked as a percentage of all users of Kaspersky mobile technologies in the country.

For the fifth year in a row, Iran topped the leaderboard by share of infections: 40.22% of users there encountered mobile threats. As in the previous year, this was largely due to the active distribution of adware from the AdWare.AndroidOS.Notifyer family.

In second place is China (28.86%), where users most often crossed paths with potentially unwanted apps from the RiskTool.AndroidOS.Wapron family. Members of this family target victims' mobile accounts, in particular by sending chargeable text messages on behalf of the victim as payment for supposedly viewing porn.

Not far behind in third place lies Saudi Arabia (27.99%), where users most often came across adware from the AdWare.AndroidOS.HiddenAd family.

## Distribution of detected mobile threats by type

### Distribution of new detected mobile threats by type, 2020 and 2021 ([download](#))

As in 2020, adware (42.42%) accounted for the largest share of all detected threats in the reporting period, despite a fall of 14.83 p.p. against 2020.

Potentially unwanted RiskTool apps (35.27%) ranked second; their share increased by 13.93 p.p. after a sharp decline in 2019–2020.

In third place were Trojan threats (8.86%), whose share rose by 4.41 p.p.



## Distribution of attacks by type of software used

### *Distribution of attacks by type of software used, 2021 ([download](#))*

In 2021, as in previous years, the largest share of attacks on mobile users belonged to malware (80.69%). At the same time, the share of adware-based attacks continued to grow: 16.92% versus 14.62% in 2020, while the share of attacks using RiskWare-class apps fell (2.38% versus 3.21%).

### **Mobile adware**

In the reporting period, as in 2020, more than half of all detected adware (53.66%) came from the Ewind family, an aggressive form of adware that tracks user actions and resists deletion.

Top 10 adware families detected in 2021

	Name	% *
1	Ewind	53.66
2	HiddenAd	18.48
3	FakeAdBlocker	13.34
4	MobiDash	3.54
5	Adlo	1.89
6	Dnotua	1.09
7	Agent	1.09
8	Fyben	1.05
9	Loead	0.66
10	Kuguo	0.63

*\* Share of the adware family packages in the total number of adware packages.*

### **RiskTool-class apps**

In 2021, SMSreg regained its supremacy among RiskTool-class threats: 90.96% of detected apps of this type were members of this family. In absolute terms, the number of SMSreg packages more than doubled compared to 2020 to 1,111,713 apps. A characteristic feature of this family is making payments (for example, money transfers or subscriptions to mobile services) by text message without explicitly informing the user.

Top 10 RiskTool families detected in 2021

	Name	% *
1	SMSreg	90.96
2	Dnotua	4.07
3	Resharer	1.14
4	Robtes	1.06
5	Agent	0.79
6	Wapron	0.53
7	Autopay	0.28
8	SmsPay	0.18
9	ContactsCollector	0.17
10	Hamad	0.12

*\* Share of the RiskTool family packages in the total number of RiskTool packages.*

### **Top 20 mobile malware programs**

*Note that the malware rankings below exclude riskware or PUAs, such as RiskTool or adware.*

	Verdict	% *
1	DangerousObject.Multi.Generic	33.69
2	Trojan-SMS.AndroidOS.Agent.ado	6.65
3	DangerousObject.AndroidOS.GenericML	4.92



4	Trojan-Spy.AndroidOS.SmsThief.po	3.91
5	Trojan.AndroidOS.Agent.vz	3.68
6	Trojan-Downloader.AndroidOS.Necro.d	3.58
7	Trojan.AndroidOS.Triada.el	3.07
8	Trojan.AndroidOS.Whatreg.b	3.02
9	Trojan.AndroidOS.Triada.ef	3.01
10	Trojan-Dropper.AndroidOS.Hqwar.cf	2.81
11	Trojan-Dropper.AndroidOS.Hqwar.bk	2.80
12	Trojan.AndroidOS.MobOk.ad	2.78
13	Trojan.AndroidOS.Hiddad.gx	2.11
14	Trojan.AndroidOS.Triada.dq	2.02
15	Trojan-SMS.AndroidOS.Fakeapp.b	1.91
16	Exploit.AndroidOS.Lotoor.be	1.84
17	Trojan-Dropper.AndroidOS.Agent.rp	1.75
18	HackTool.AndroidOS.Wifikill.c	1.60
19	Trojan-Banker.AndroidOS.Agent.eq	1.58
20	Trojan-Downloader.AndroidOS.Agent.kx	1.55

*\* Unique users attacked by this malware as a percentage of all attacked users of Kaspersky mobile technologies.*

As per tradition, first place in our Top 20 went to DangerousObject.Multi.Generic (33.69%), the verdict we use for malware detected [using cloud technologies](#). Cloud technologies are deployed when the antivirus databases lack data for detecting a piece of malware, but the company's cloud already contains information about the object. This is essentially how the latest malware types are detected.

Trojan-SMS.AndroidOS.Agent.ado (6.65%), which sends text messages to short premium numbers, moved up from sixth to second position. Victims of this malware are predominantly in Russia.

In third place was the verdict DangerousObject.AndroidOS.GenericML (4.92%). These verdicts are assigned to files recognized as malicious by our [machine-learning systems](#).

Fourth position was taken by Trojan-Spy.AndroidOS.SmsThief.po (3.91%), whose main function is to monitor incoming text messages and send captured data to the cybercriminals' server.

In fifth place was Trojan.AndroidOS.Agent.vz (3.68%), a malicious module that forms a link in the infection chain of various Trojans and is responsible for downloading other modules, in particular the above-mentioned Ewind adware.

Trojan-Downloader.AndroidOS.Necro.d (3.58%), which downloads, installs and runs other apps on command, dropped to sixth place.

Trojans from the Triada family ranked seventh, ninth and fourteenth in the ranking. These are used to download and run other malicious programs on the infected device. Users infected with Triada also frequently encounter the above-mentioned Trojan-Downloader.AndroidOS.Necro.d, as well as Trojan.AndroidOS.Whatreg.b (eighth place, 3.02%), which allows cybercriminals to link new WhatsApp accounts to victims' phone numbers and use them at will, and also Trojan-Dropper.AndroidOS.Agent.rp (seventeenth place, 1.75%), which decrypts payloads from APK file resources before downloading and running other malware.

Tenth and eleventh places go to members of the Trojan-Dropper.AndroidOS.Hqwar family of droppers that unpack and run various banking Trojans on the victim's device. After a rise in the number of attacks by this malware in 2020, the number of detections in the reporting period fell back to 2019 levels.

Twelfth position is taken by a member of the Trojan.AndroidOS.MobOk.ad family (2.78%), which subscribes users to paid services.

Thirteenth place belongs to Trojan.AndroidOS.Hiddad.gx (2.11%), tasked with displaying advertising banners and ensuring a permanent presence on the device by hiding the icon in the app bar.

In fifteenth place is Trojan-SMS.AndroidOS.Fakeapp.b (1.91%), which can send text messages and make calls to specified numbers, display ads and hide its icon on the device. Most users attacked by this malware were located in Russia.

Exploit.AndroidOS.Lotoor.be (1.84%), an exploit used to elevate privileges on Android devices to superuser, lies in sixteenth position. Members of this family are found bundled with other common malware such as Triada and Necro.

Eighteenth place is secured by the HackTool.AndroidOS.Wifkill.c utility (1.60%), whose task is to carry out DOS attacks on Wi-Fi networks to disconnect other users.

In nineteenth place is Trojan-Banker.AndroidOS.Agent.eq (1.58%). Hiding behind this verdict are mostly banking Trojans from the Wroba family, and more than half of attacks targeted Japan.

Trojan-Downloader.AndroidOS.Agent.kx (1.55%), which is distributed with legitimate software and downloads adware, rounds out our Top 20.

### **Mobile banking Trojans**

In 2021, we detected 97,661 installation packages for mobile banking Trojans, which is down 59,049 from the previous year. The largest contributors to the statistics were the Trojan-Banker.AndroidOS.Agent (37.69% of all detected banking Trojans), Trojan-Banker.AndroidOS.Bray (21.08%) and Trojan-Banker.AndroidOS.Fakecalls (9.91%) families.

### ***Number of installation packages of mobile banking Trojans detected by Kaspersky, 2018–2021*** ***([download](#))***

After sharp growth in the number of attacks by mobile banking Trojans starting H2 2020, we have seen a gradual decrease since the spring of 2021.

### ***Number of attacks by mobile banking Trojans, 2020–2021*** ([download](#))

Top 10 mobile banking Trojans

	Verdict	% *
1	Trojan-Banker.AndroidOS.Agent.eq	19.22
2	Trojan-Banker.AndroidOS.Anubis.t	14.93
3	Trojan-Banker.AndroidOS.Svpeng.t	8.98
4	Trojan-Banker.AndroidOS.Svpeng.q	7.58
5	Trojan-Banker.AndroidOS.Asacub.ce	5.05
6	Trojan-Banker.AndroidOS.Agent.ep	4.88
7	Trojan-Banker.AndroidOS.Hqwar.t	3.08
8	Trojan-Banker.AndroidOS.Bian.f	2.46
9	Trojan-Banker.AndroidOS.Agent.cf	2.03
10	Trojan-Banker.AndroidOS.Bian.h	2.02

\* Unique users attacked by this malware as a percentage of all users of Kaspersky mobile technologies that were attacked by banking threats.

In 2021, Trojan-Banker.AndroidOS.Agent.eq (19.22%) topped the list of banking Trojans we detected, having also featured in our overall Top 20 ranking of mobile threats. In second place is the banker Anubis.t (14.93%). Third and fourth positions were claimed by bankers from the Svpeng family: Svpeng.t (8.98%) and Svpeng.q (7.58%).

### ***Geography of mobile banking threats, 2021*** ([download](#))

## Top 10 countries by shares of users attacked by mobile banking trojans

	Country*	%**
1	Japan	2.18
2	Spain	1.55
3	Turkey	0.71
4	France	0.57
5	Australia	0.48
6	Germany	0.46
7	Norway	0.31
8	Italy	0.29
9	Croatia	0.28
10	Austria	0.28

\* Excluded from the rating are countries with relatively few users of Kaspersky mobile technologies (under 10,000).

\*\* Unique users attacked by mobile banking Trojans in the country as a percentage of all users of Kaspersky mobile technologies in the country.

In 2021, Japan ranked first by share of unique users attacked by mobile bankers (2.18%). The above-mentioned Trojan-Banker.AndroidOS.Agent.eq made the biggest contribution: 96.12% of all attacks. Silver belongs to Spain (1.55%), where Trojan-Banker.AndroidOS.Bian.h was most often encountered (28.97%). And bronze goes to Turkey (0.71%), where Trojan-Banker.AndroidOS.Agent.ep (32.22%) leads the way.

## Mobile ransomware Trojans

In 2021, we detected 17,372 installation packages for mobile ransomware Trojans — 3,336 fewer than last year.

### *Number of installation packages for mobile ransomware Trojans detected by Kaspersky, 2018–2021 ([download](#))*

What is more, the number of attacks by mobile ransomware Trojans, after a sharp increase in H2 2020, remained at the same level with a slight dip by the end of 2021.

### *Number of attacks by mobile ransomware Trojans, 2020–2021 ([download](#))*

#### Top 10 mobile ransomware Trojans

	Verdict	%*
1	Trojan-Ransom.AndroidOS.Pigetr1.a	59.39
2	Trojan-Ransom.AndroidOS.Rkor.an	3.86
3	Trojan-Ransom.AndroidOS.Small.as	3.39
4	Trojan-Ransom.AndroidOS.Rkor.ax	3.23
5	Trojan-Ransom.AndroidOS.Rkor.bb	2.58
6	Trojan-Ransom.AndroidOS.Congur.am	2.35
7	Trojan-Ransom.AndroidOS.Rkor.be	2.29
8	Trojan-Ransom.AndroidOS.Rkor.bc	1.95
9	Trojan-Ransom.AndroidOS.Rkor.bh	1.88
10	Trojan-Ransom.AndroidOS.Rkor.az	1.79

\* Unique users attacked by this malware as a percentage of all users of Kaspersky mobile technologies that were attacked by ransomware Trojans.

In 2021, Trojan-Ransom.AndroidOS.Pigetr1.a topped the leaderboard of ransomware Trojans with 59.39% of all users attacked by ransomware. Moreover, 91.67% of attacks by this Trojan hit users in Russia. Unlike traditional representatives of the Trojan-Ransom class, this malware does not demand a ransom, but simply locks the device screen with a prompt to enter a code. The Trojan provides no instructions on how to get this code, which is embedded in the body of the malware.

In second place by popularity among cybercriminals are members of the long familiar Trojan-Ransom.AndroidOS.Rkor family, taking seven positions in the Top 10. This malware accuses the user of viewing prohibited content and demands payment of a fine.

### ***Geography of mobile ransomware Trojans, 2021 ([download](#))***

Top 10 countries by share of users attacked by mobile ransomware Trojans

	Country*	%**
1	Kazakhstan	0.80
2	Yemen	0.37
3	Kyrgyzstan	0.25
4	Sweden	0.20
5	Iraq	0.13
6	Colombia	0.12
7	China	0.12
8	Saudi Arabia	0.08
9	Uzbekistan	0.08
10	Morocco	0.06

\* Excluded from the rating are countries with relatively few users of Kaspersky mobile technologies (under 10,000).

\*\* Unique users attacked by mobile ransomware Trojans in the country as a percentage of all users of Kaspersky mobile technologies in the country.

The top-placed countries by number of users attacked by mobile ransomware Trojans in 2021 were Kazakhstan (0.80%), Yemen (0.37%) and Kyrgyzstan (0.25%). Users in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan most often encountered members of the Trojan-Ransom.AndroidOS.Rkor family, and in Yemen Trojan-Ransom.AndroidOS.Pigetr1.a.

### **Conclusion**

In the reporting period, after a surge in H2 2020, cybercriminal activity gradually abated: there were no global newsbreaks or major campaigns, and the Covid-19 topic began to fade. At the same time, new players continue to emerge on the cyberthreat market as malware becomes more sophisticated; thus, the fall in the overall number of attacks is “compensated” by the greater impact of a successful attack. Most dangerous of all in this regard are banking malware and spyware.

As in 2020, adware makes up the lion’s share of newly detected mobile threats, but its lead over the previous frontrunner — potentially unwanted software — is shrinking. That said, more than 80% of attacks are still carried out using mobile malware.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	<b>02/21 DC Metro social media hacked</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/feb/21/dc-metro-social-media-hacked/">https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/feb/21/dc-metro-social-media-hacked/</a>
GIST	Two of the Metro’s main Twitter accounts were hacked Monday morning, changing the @WMATA handle to “Blueface Da Bus” and posting explicit tweets.  The posts have been deleted as of Monday afternoon.  “We are aware that Metro’s Twitter accounts @WMATA @MetrorailInfo were hacked and obscene posts were made that do not represent Metro’s organization or culture,” Metro media relations manager Sherri Ly told WDM. “The posts will be removed, and our accounts will be secured. We are working to understand who may be responsible for this breach.”
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>02/21 Israel probe: no police abuse spyware case</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/israeli-probe-finds-sign-police-abuse-spyware-case-83032258">https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/israeli-probe-finds-sign-police-abuse-spyware-case-83032258</a>

JERUSALEM -- An Israeli [investigation](#) found “no indication” that police illegally hacked the mobile phones of dozens of public figures, the Justice Ministry announced Monday, contradicting the key claims of a series of explosive investigative reports in a leading Israeli newspaper.

Israel’s attorney general ordered the investigation last month in the wake of the unsourced reports by the Calcalist business daily, which said police spied on politicians, protesters and even members of former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s inner circle, including one of his sons.

The paper said police used Pegasus, a controversial spyware program developed by the Israeli company NSO Group, without obtaining a court warrant.

In its announcement, the Justice Ministry said the investigation led by the country's deputy attorney general found no evidence to support the claims.

“There is no indication that police deployed Pegasus software without a court order against people on the list published in the media,” it said, adding that NSO and government security experts assisted in the probe.

The investigation found that police received authorization to spy on the phones of three of the people on the list, but only one was successfully infiltrated. It said investigators looked into the use of a second type of spyware used by police and also found no signs of wrongdoing.

The Calcalist reports prompted a public uproar. The current prime minister, Naftali Bennett, said the allegations were “very serious,” and Netanyahu, who is on trial for alleged corruption, demanded a “strong and independent investigation” while trying to cast doubt on the charges against him. The country’s public security minister, who oversees the police force, has also formed a high-level government commission of inquiry.

Police officials, both former and current, have denied any wrongdoing. Those denials, along with the lack of evidence uncovered so far, have begun to draw scrutiny on Calcalist's reports.

Its reporter, Tomer Ganon, has stood by his work. Over the weekend, he said he would continue to protect his sources. “I risked my good name not because of naivety, but because I checked the facts,” he wrote on Twitter.

Pegasus is a powerful tool that allows its operator to infiltrate a target’s phone and sweep up its contents, including messages, contacts and location history.

For NSO, which has faced mounting criticism over Pegasus, Monday’s report was a rare piece of good news. It said it hoped the conclusions “will result in reporting that no longer relies upon misinformation and political organizations issuing biased and prejudiced reports.”

NSO has been linked to snooping on human rights activists, journalists and politicians in countries ranging from Saudi Arabia to Poland to Mexico to the United Arab Emirates. In November, the U.S. Commerce Department blacklisted the company, saying its tools had been used to “conduct transnational repression.”

NSO says it sells the product only to government entities to fight crime and terrorism, with all sales regulated by the Israeli government.

The company does not identify its clients and says it has no knowledge of who is targeted. Although it says it has safeguards in place to prevent abuse, it says it ultimately does not control how its clients use the software.

NSO said the misuse of spyware “is a serious matter and all credible allegations must be investigated.” It called for “an international regulatory structure” to be put in place to “oversee issues raised by the misuse of cyber intelligence tools.”

HEADLINE	<b>02/21 Crypto-scammers new target: dating apps</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/21/technology/crypto-scammers-new-target-dating-apps.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/21/technology/crypto-scammers-new-target-dating-apps.html</a>
GIST	<p>The man from the dating app Hinge checked all of Tho Vu's boxes.</p> <p>He was a boyishly handsome architect from China, staying in Maryland on a long-term assignment. They had never met in person — he was still waiting to get his Covid-19 booster shot, he said — but they had texted back and forth for months and she'd developed a serious crush. He called her his "little sweetheart," and told her that he was planning to take her to China to meet his family when the pandemic was over.</p> <p>So when the man, who went by the name Ze Zhao, told Ms. Vu, who works in customer service for a security company, that he could help her make money by trading Bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies, she was intrigued.</p> <p>"I'd heard a lot about crypto in the news," she said. "I'm a curious person, and he actually was very knowledgeable about the whole trading process."</p> <p>But the man wasn't trying to help Ms. Vu invest her money. He was entrapping her in an increasingly popular type of financial scam, she said, one that combines the age-old allure of romance with the newer temptation of overnight cryptocurrency riches.</p> <p>Within weeks, Ms. Vu, 33, had sent more than \$300,000 worth of Bitcoin, nearly her entire life savings, to an address that Mr. Zhao had told her was connected to an account on the Hong Kong cryptocurrency exchange OSL. The website looked legitimate, offered 24/7 online customer support and had even been updated to show Ms. Vu's balance changing as the price of Bitcoin rose and fell.</p> <p>Mr. Zhao — whose real name could not be verified — had promised her that her crypto investments would help them get married and start a life together.</p> <p>"We can make more money on top of OSL and go on a honeymoon," he said, according to a screenshot of their texts that Ms. Vu shared with me.</p> <p>But there was no honeymoon, and no crypto windfall. Instead of going into an exchange account, Ms. Vu's money went into the scammer's digital wallet, and he vanished.</p> <p>Now, she is struggling to make sense of what happened.</p> <p>"I thought I knew him," she said. "Everything was a lie."</p> <p>Romance scams — the term for online scams that involve feigning romantic interest to gain a victim's trust — have <a href="#">increased in the pandemic</a>. So have crypto prices. That has made crypto a useful entry point for criminals looking to part victims from their savings.</p> <p>About 56,000 romance scams, totaling \$139 million in losses, were reported to the Federal Trade Commission last year, according to <a href="#">agency data</a>. That is nearly twice as many reports as the agency received the previous year. In a bulletin last fall, the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Oregon office <a href="#">warned</a> that crypto dating scams were emerging as a major category of cybercrime, with more than 1,800 reported cases in the first seven months of the year.</p> <p>Experts believe this particular type of scam originated in China before spreading to the United States and Europe. Its Chinese name <a href="#">translates roughly</a> as "pig butchering" — a reference to the way victims are "fattened up" with flattery and romance before being scammed.</p> <p>Jan Santiago, the deputy director of the Global Anti-Scam Organization, a nonprofit that represents victims of online cryptocurrency scams, said that unlike typical romance scams — which generally target</p>



older, less tech-savvy adults — these scammers appear to be going after younger and more educated women on dating apps like Tinder, Bumble and Hinge.

“It’s mostly millennials who are getting scammed,” Mr. Santiago said.

Jane Lee, a researcher at the online fraud-prevention firm Sift, began looking into crypto dating scams last year. She signed up for several popular dating apps and quickly matched with men who tried to offer her investing advice.

“People are lonely from the pandemic, and crypto is super hot right now,” she said. “The combination of the two has really made this a successful scam.”

Ms. Lee, whose company works with several dating apps to prevent fraud, said that these scammers typically tried to move the conversation off a dating app and onto WhatsApp — where messages are encrypted and harder for companies or law enforcement agencies to track.

From there, the scammer bombards the victim with flirtatious messages until turning the conversation to cryptocurrency. The scammer, posing as a successful crypto trader, offers to show the victim how to invest his or her money for fast, low-risk gains.

Then, Ms. Lee said, the scammer helps the victim buy cryptocurrency on a legitimate site, like Coinbase or Crypto.com, and provides instructions for transferring it to a fake cryptocurrency exchange. The victim’s money appears on the exchange’s website, and he or she starts “investing” it in various crypto assets, under the scammer’s guidance, before the scammer ultimately absconds with the money.

What makes this particular scam so insidious is how much more elaborate it is than the [Nigerian prince scams](#) of yore. Some victims have described being directed to realistic-looking websites with charts and tickers showing the prices of various crypto assets. The names and addresses of the fake exchanges are changed frequently, and victims are often allowed to withdraw small amounts of money early on, making them more comfortable depositing larger sums later.

“This kind of scam is quite labor-intensive and time-consuming,” Mr. Santiago, of the Global Anti-Scam Organization, said. “They’re very meticulous in their social engineering.”

Cryptocurrencies are particularly useful to scammers, experts say, because of the relative privacy they offer. Bitcoin transactions are publicly visible, but because digital wallets can be set up anonymously, technically sophisticated criminals can obscure the trail of money. And because there is no central bank or deposit insurance to make victims whole, stolen money usually can’t be recovered.

Niki Hutchinson, a 24-year-old social media producer from Tennessee, fell victim to a crypto romance scam last year. She was visiting a friend in California when she matched on Hinge with a man named Hao, who said he lived nearby and worked in the clothing business.

The two continued texting on WhatsApp for more than a month after she returned home. She told Hao that she was adopted from China; he told her that he was Chinese, too, and that he hailed from the same province as her birth family. He started calling her “sister” and joking that he was her long-lost brother. (They video-chatted once, she said — but Hao only partly showed his face and hung up quickly.)

“I thought he was shy,” she said.

Ms. Hutchinson had just inherited nearly \$300,000 from the sale of her childhood home, after her mother died. Hao suggested that she invest that money in cryptocurrency.

“I want to teach you to invest in cryptocurrency when you are free, bring some changes to your life and bring an extra income to your life,” he texted her, according to a screenshot of the exchange.



	<p>Eventually she agreed, sending a small amount of crypto to the wallet address he gave her, which he said was connected to an account on a crypto exchange named ICAC. Then — when the money appeared on ICAC’s website — she sent more.</p> <p>She couldn’t believe how easy it had been to make money, just by following Hao’s advice. Eventually, when she’d invested her entire savings, she took out a loan and kept investing more.</p> <p>In December, Ms. Hutchinson started to get suspicious when she tried to withdraw money from her account. The transaction failed, and a customer service agent for ICAC told her that her account would be frozen unless she paid hundreds of thousands of dollars in taxes. Her chat with Hao went silent.</p> <p>“I was like, oh, God, what have I done?” she said.</p> <p>Now, Ms. Hutchinson is trying to pull her life back together. She and her father live in their R.V. — one of the few assets they have left — and she is working with the local police in Florida to try to track down her scammer.</p> <p>Ms. Hutchinson doesn’t expect to get her money back, but she hopes that other people will be more cautious about strangers who promise to help them invest in cryptocurrency.</p> <p>“You hear all these stories about people becoming millionaires,” she said. “It just felt like, oh, well, cryptocurrency’s the new trend, and I need to get in.”</p>
	<a href="#">Return to Top</a>

HEADLINE	<b>02/20 At Olympics, cybersecurity worries linger</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/Business/wireStory/olympics-cybersecurity-worries-linger-background-83021033">https://abcnews.go.com/Business/wireStory/olympics-cybersecurity-worries-linger-background-83021033</a>
GIST	<p>BEIJING -- Warnings to use disposable “burner” phones and laptops. Privacy-protecting software. Concerns about a security flaw in an official Games smartphone app.</p> <p>Such precautions fueled unease about data privacy for competitors and attendees at the Winter Olympics in Beijing. Not everyone heeded them.</p> <p>“Honestly, I’ve been coming to China for 12 years or whatever, and I’m not that important,” Canadian snowboarder Mark McMorris said. “Maybe if I was a diplomat or something, then I’d switch out my phone.”</p> <p>Nefarious cyber activity is a flashpoint in the geopolitical rivalry between China and the West. Beijing has long been accused by the U.S. and technology watchdogs of widespread online snooping and data pilfering, allegations it denies.</p> <p>Now that the Games are ending, and some 16,000 athletes, organizers, journalists and other visitors are heading home, concerns turn to what malware and other problems those who failed to heed the warnings might be carrying with them.</p> <p>The good news: Cybersecurity firm Mandiant said there’s been no sign of any “intrusion activity” tied to the Olympics by the Chinese or other governments.</p> <p>But that shouldn’t be taken as a sign that nothing happened, said Benjamin Read, Mandiant’s director of cyber espionage analysis.</p> <p>“Most compromises are detected weeks or months after they occur, so it’s too early to say for sure that there were no incidents,” he said.</p> <p>It’s also possible that the electronic surveillance was most important when visitors were in China, and wouldn’t continue when those people went home, he said.</p>

He advised anyone who travelled to China for the Winter Games to change their passwords when they get back and make sure that no unknown devices or services have access to their accounts.

“It’s not always possible to know if a device has been compromised so it’s best to take every precaution,” he said.

Unfettered internet access is important for many amateur Olympic athletes who post photos and videos of their feats on Instagram and other social media sites. It can be critical for landing sponsors.

“I’m on my phone for sure. I think we’re all on our phones,” said Canadian snowboarder Laurie Blouin, who said she was “feeding the ’Grams.”

McMorris said he was using his iPhone to stream TV shows, exchange chat messages and post on Instagram, Twitter and TikTok.

And U.S.-born Chinese freestyle skiing sensation Eileen Gu has posted multiple times on Instagram since the Games began.

When a user asked why she was able to use the app, which is blocked in China, Gu responded that “anyone can download a vpn,” or virtual private network, software that scrambles communications so it can’t be read by anyone except the recipient.

The posts, which later disappeared, sparked an online outcry over internet freedom, in part because VPNs aren’t available in Chinese app stores after authorities cracked down on their use.

Some U.S. athletes said they were also using VPNs, which can be used to tunnel through China’s so-called “Great Firewall” a censorship system which blocks websites, services and apps deemed inappropriate by authorities.

The U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Committee had told athletes that anything they do online while in China would be monitored. The Canadian Olympic Committee warned there was the potential for cybercrimes.

But while there weren’t specific details about threats, experts said it most likely wasn’t about getting a competitive edge at the games.

“The Chinese government is not interested in the average snowboarder,” said Greg Austin, a senior fellow at the International Institute for Strategic Studies.

“They are interested in collecting whatever data they have and putting it into a database on the chance that the snowboarder would become a politician or a leader in a position of influence,” Austin said.

He added that it’s not uncommon practice for intelligence services of any country.

Beijing was also likely monitoring for anything politically sensitive in Olympic visitors’ communications, such as contact with dissidents, Austin said.

Journalists were arguably a juicier target than athletes, and many also brought burner devices.

The International Olympic Committee said cybersecurity is “an important aspect of hosting the Games” but that in order to maintain secure operations, it would not comment further.

At any rate, some participants who did take precautions were looking forward to resuming their daily diet of streaming and social media.

U.S. figure skater Mariah Bell was given a burner phone but had been staying off social media and Netflix, which she said was “both amazing and boring.”

	"I'm very excited to go home see my dog," she said, "see my family, go back to sitting on Instagram for hours."
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>02/18 Crackdown spyware vendors to escalate?</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.vice.com/en/article/jgmbag/the-us-crackdown-on-spyware-vendors-is-only-beginning">https://www.vice.com/en/article/jgmbag/the-us-crackdown-on-spyware-vendors-is-only-beginning</a>
GIST	<p>On Tuesday, the Department of Justice <a href="#">announced</a> that a Mexican businessman had pleaded guilty to conspiring to sell surveillance and hacking tools made by <a href="#">Hacking Team</a>, a notorious spyware vendor that is now defunct.</p> <p>The case, according to experts, shows that the U.S. government is willing to go after individuals who acted as middlemen between well-known international spyware vendors and foreign countries like Mexico, signaling a potential escalation in the U.S. government's crackdown on spyware vendors.</p> <p>In its press release, U.S. authorities made it clear that this case wasn't just about Guerrero.</p> <p>"Today's guilty plea helps stem the proliferation of digital tools used for repression and advances the digital security of both U.S. and Mexican citizens," U.S. Attorney Randy Grossman is quoted as saying.</p> <p><a href="#">In the plea agreement</a>, Carlos Guerrero, who was the head of a company that distributed surveillance technology called Elite by Carga, admitted that he sold Hacking Team spyware knowing that the Mexican authorities who were purchasing it "could and likely would" use it for "political purposes, not just for law enforcement purposes."</p> <p>The agreement cites a few cases in particular. In one, Guerrero and his employee Daniel Moreno helped the mayor of a town in the state of Morelos to hack a political rival and access their Twitter, Hotmail, and iCloud accounts. In another case in December 2015, Guerrero and one of his employees used "an interception device" to wiretap the phone calls of "a business competitor." And in another instance in February 2017, "one or more Elite by Carga employees agreed to hack the phone and email account of a Florida-based sales representative of a large Mexican business in exchange for an approximately \$25,000 payment from the Mexican business."</p> <p>The plea agreement doesn't include more details about the two cases.</p> <p>Guerrero's lawyer did not immediately respond to a request for comment and a spokesperson for the U.S. Attorney's Office of the Southern District of California, which prosecuted the case, declined to comment, saying "that's all the information that is publicly available at this time."</p> <p>But a person with knowledge of the case, who asked to remain anonymous as they were not authorized to speak to the press, told Motherboard that the investigation is still ongoing and there will be more developments in the next few months.</p> <p>John Scott-Railton, a senior researcher at the Citizen Lab, a digital rights watchdog housed at the University of Toronto's Munk School that has investigated companies like Hacking Team and Israeli spyware vendor NSO Group for years, told Motherboard that he was pleased with the news, and that this case "sends another signal" that the U.S. government is very interested "in mercenary spyware abuses."</p> <p>"Clearly, they have a long memory," he said in an online chat. "I bet a few spyware distributors will have a terrible sleep tonight, and think twice before flying to the U.S. any time soon."</p> <p>The indictment of Guerrero, according to Scott-Railton and another researcher who has been investigating surveillance in Mexico, is yet another case that shows abuses in the country were rampant.</p> <p>"It also helps cement our understanding of Mexican spyware customers as serial abusers. Nobody should be selling them spyware right now," Scott-Railton said.</p>

	<p>“The acquisition and use of surveillance tech by Mexican authorities is out of control, full of corruption, abuse and impunity,” Luis Fernando García, the director of Red en Defensa de los Derechos Digitales (<a href="#">R3D</a>), a Mexican digital rights organization, said in an online chat. “Although I can’t speculate on what the USG motives or strategy is, certainly any actions by the US justice system that hold vendors and abusers accountable are very welcomed.”</p> <p><a href="#">According to Mexican news outlet El Punto Norte</a>, Guerrero and his government contacts were investigated in the country as well, but the inquiry was closed.</p> <p>Guerrero’s case comes months after the US government <a href="#">announced that it had added NSO to a list of companies</a> that are restricted from purchasing products and services from US companies, effectively making it hard for them to procure crucial equipment and technology. More recently, <a href="#">a European watchdog suggested</a> that European governments should halt the development and purchase of any technology like the spyware developed by NSO.</p> <p>Guerrero is out of jail awaiting the sentencing hearing, which is scheduled for May 13.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>02/19 OpenSea high-value NFTs stolen, sold</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.vice.com/en/article/xqd53z/hacker-actively-stealing-high-value-nfts-on-opensea">https://www.vice.com/en/article/xqd53z/hacker-actively-stealing-high-value-nfts-on-opensea</a>
GIST	<p>A hacker or hackers are actively stealing and flipping high-valued NFTs from users on OpenSea, the world’s largest NFT exchange, causing chaos and confusion in the broader NFT community.</p> <p>The current mechanism for the hack is currently unknown, but OpenSea placed a red banner at the top of its site Saturday night saying “We are actively investigating rumors of an exploit associated with OpenSea related smart contracts. This appears to be a phishing attack originating outside of OpenSea’s website. Do not click links outside of opensea.io.”</p> <p>OpenSea is currently requiring users who list NFTs on the site to <a href="#">upgrade to a new smart contract</a> that <a href="#">fixes an issue</a> with <a href="#">inactive listings</a> that was allowing scammers to <a href="#">swipe valuable NFTs from collectors</a> on OpenSea for dirt cheap; some high profile NFT users are speculating now that a malicious actor is phishing people with a fake page designed to look like the one used to upgrade to that contract.</p> <p>OpenSea did not immediately respond to a request for comment. A discussion about the hacks on Twitter Spaces had more than 3,700 listeners Saturday night.</p> <p><a href="#">Blockchain records</a> show that the attacker was able to transfer numerous NFTs from different users to their address for free. Stolen NFTs included examples from the Bored Ape Yacht Club, Mutant Ape Yacht Club, and several other popular collections. The attacker has already sold some of the NFTs, for example, <a href="#">this NFT from the Azuki collection</a> for 13.4 ETH (\$36,380). The attacker’s wallet currently contains more than 600 ETH worth nearly \$2 million.</p> <p>There are indications that the hacker is giving some of their ill-gotten goods back. In one instance, the hacker <a href="#">stole numerous NFTs from one user</a> including one valuable BAYC NFT. The hacker <a href="#">returned all the NFTs</a> except the BAYC, <a href="#">which is currently frozen</a> on OpenSea. The attacker’s page on the marketplace similarly 404s.</p> <p>Security researcher Dan Guido tweeted Saturday night that “the security of web3 platforms depend entirely on wallets with universally poor security UX, and there’s very little the platforms can do about it,” adding that, “in a strange win for transparency,” it’s currently <a href="#">possible to see which NFTs</a> have been stolen.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>02/18 SIM-swapping attacks at crypto-accounts</b>
----------	--

SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/sim-swapping-attacks-many-aimed-at-crypto-accounts-are-on-the-rise-11645227375?mod=lead_feature_below_a_pos1">https://www.wsj.com/articles/sim-swapping-attacks-many-aimed-at-crypto-accounts-are-on-the-rise-11645227375?mod=lead_feature_below_a_pos1</a>
GIST	<p>Cyber thieves targeting crypto and traditional bank accounts stepped up their illegal activities last year, resulting in a significant increase in the number of reported SIM-card crimes.</p> <p>The Federal Bureau of Investigation received more than 1,600 SIM-swap complaints in 2021, the agency said, resulting in estimated losses of as much as \$68 million. In the three years prior, the FBI received a combined 320 complaints, totaling an estimated \$12 million in losses, it said.</p> <p>The jump is due in part to cyber thieves finding a way around the increased security of multifactor authentication protections that rely on a text message or code sent to a customer's phone to confirm their identity.</p> <p>The criminals target people with valuable online accounts, particularly crypto, said Allison Nixon, chief research officer at Unit 221B, a boutique cyber and tech security firm based in New York City.</p> <p>Attackers also go after social-media accounts with large followings that could be held ransom for their return, as well as any kind of sensitive personal information, Ms. Nixon said.</p> <p>The FBI's warning to small investors comes as federal law-enforcement officials beef up their efforts to track digital currencies that fund many criminal networks. On Thursday, the Justice Department <a href="#">launched a unit</a> dedicated to tracing and potentially seizing illicit crypto as part of a broader push to disrupt cybercriminals.</p> <p>Cyber thieves use a variety of tactics to trick mobile carriers into moving a customer's SIM card to a new phone that they control. Once the SIM is swapped, the victim's calls, texts and other data go to the criminal's device, allowing them to reset passwords and respond to login verifications, the FBI said.</p> <p>Cyber thieves can be in and out before the victim knows what's happening, said Ms. Nixon.</p> <p>"They always move faster than the victim," she said.</p> <p>Mobile carriers are trying to find ways to fight the fraud, according to the Cellular Telecommunications and Internet Association, a trade group that represents the wireless industry.</p> <p>"While each provider's tools and practices are different, the industry employs a variety of tactics to stop SIM swap fraud," CTIA says on its website, which dedicates a section to prevention tips.</p> <p>Some of the best practices include setting up hard-to-guess pin codes and adding additional protections such as email approval or verbal approval as well as text authentication before a cell number is ported to a new phone.</p> <p>Eric Cole, founder and chief executive of Secure Anchor Consulting, a cybersecurity firm, said the surge in reported crimes is linked in part to the 2021 <a href="#">cryptocurrency boom</a>.</p> <p>Once a thief gets control of a victim's phone, they can empty an account in 90 seconds and the victim likely won't even realize it has happened, he said.</p> <p>"I've seen \$15 million to \$20 million stolen in a single SIM swap, because the sole source of protection was multifactor authentication," Mr. Cole said.</p> <p>He knows of at least 30 such crimes that have occurred in the past six months, he said. Together, the victims lost about \$320 million, according to Mr. Cole. He knows of one victim who lost \$43 million from a crypto account.</p> <p>"And that's probably just a small piece of a much larger pie," he said of the thefts.</p>

HEADLINE	<b>02/18 Spyware stifling human rights in Bahrain?</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/news/2022/feb/18/how-spyware-erodes-human-rights-in-bahrain-nso-group-pegasus-project">https://www.theguardian.com/news/2022/feb/18/how-spyware-erodes-human-rights-in-bahrain-nso-group-pegasus-project</a>
GIST	<p>Mohammed al-Tajer was caught off guard when his iPhone pinged last November with a warning that said his phone had been targeted by a nation state.</p> <p>The 55-year-old lawyer from Bahrain had been known among dissidents for his “fearless” defence of opposition leaders and protesters after the 2011 pro-democracy uprising in the tiny Gulf state, when a series of demonstrations and protests were violently suppressed by authorities <a href="#">with the help of Saudi</a> forces.</p> <p>Tajer had not been involved in human rights issues for five years, however – the last time he’d been rounded up and threatened with arrest by Bahraini authorities.</p> <p>But a forensic examination of Tajer’s phone by researchers at Citizen Lab at the University of Toronto has found that the lawyer’s phone was hacked on multiple occasions in September 2021 by a government client of NSO Group, the Israeli spyware maker.</p> <p>“I used to be head of Bahrain Human Rights Observatory, used to have human rights activities inside Bahrain or with the UN. But now I don’t have any ongoing human rights activities,” Tajer, who is still in Bahrain, told Red Line for Gulf (RL4G), a non-profit collection of journalists and activists who are focused on digital security and freedom of expression in gulf states and worked with Citizen Lab on the recent investigation.</p> <p>“The worst and most harmful thing is you feel you are not secure. That instead of your phone being your friend, it is now your enemy. You don’t know what information is private, and what is already exposed to the state, this is painful.”</p> <p>A separate investigation by the Pegasus Project – a media consortium investigating NSO Group which includes the Guardian and is coordinated by the French non-profit Forbidden Stories – has also identified 20 Bahraini officials who are close to the government and may have been targeted for surveillance. Their phone numbers were identified with the help of Ali Abdulemam of RL4G.</p> <p>The mobile numbers – including those of loyalists close to Bahrain’s ruling family – appeared on a leaked database that the Pegasus Project believes contains the phone numbers of individuals who were selected as possible surveillance targets by clients of NSO.</p> <p>The mobile phone of a US state department official who was stationed in Bahrain at the time of her selection also appears on the leaked database. A state department spokesperson said the US condemns the harassment and arbitrary or unlawful surveillance of journalists, human rights activists, or other perceived regime critics.</p> <p>“While we do not discuss security protocols, procedures, or capabilities, we can say that we are deeply concerned about the counterintelligence and security risks these types of commercial spyware pose to US government personnel,” the spokesperson said.</p> <p>The Biden administration added NSO to a <a href="#">commerce department blacklist last year</a>, citing evidence that the technology has been used by foreign governments to “maliciously target” embassy workers, journalists and activists, among others.</p> <p>While the appearance of a person’s mobile number is not evidence that the person was hacked, the Pegasus Project has previously published stories about dozens of individuals – including journalists and human rights activists – whose numbers appear on the list and whose phones were targeted or hacked by</p>



clients of NSO, according to security researchers at Amnesty International who forensically examined the devices.

The individuals who were selected as possible candidates for surveillance include 20 members of the Bahrain council of representatives, speaker Fawzia Zainal, who was appointed by the king and selected between January and March 2019, and Ahmed Sabah al-Salloum, an MP and member of the National Institution of Human Rights, an organisation that is funded by the government of Bahrain.

The Pegasus Project also identified two members of the royal family who were listed in the leaked database, including Khalid Bin Ahmed Khalifa, the former minister of foreign affairs. The individuals declined to comment on their appearance on the list.

An NSO spokesperson said: “The misuse of cyber intelligence tools is a serious matter and all credible allegations must be investigated, if and when the relevant information would be provided. The continued reporting of unsubstantiated allegations by uninformed sources is unfortunate and wrong.”

The series of revelations, security experts said, paint a picture of a state that appears poised to use surveillance technology against its perceived enemies and friends alike.

When successfully deployed against a target, Pegasus can infiltrate a mobile phone, giving the user of the spyware full access to phone calls, text messages, encrypted messages and photographs. It can track a mobile phone user’s location and turn the phone into a remote listening device.

“The situation in Bahrain is still pretty repressive,” said Bill Marczak, a senior researcher at Citizen Lab. “Since 2011 Bahrain has really made it a point to try and remove institutions that help people to organise.

“There is no space for dissent or activism, and spyware helps preserve this status quo. Because what they can do is keep an eye on what is going on in private, they can make sure there is nothing bubbling over in private.”

NSO has said its government clients are only meant to use Pegasus spyware to target serious criminals and terrorists. The company has strongly denied that the leaked database has any connection to the Israeli firm and said the phone numbers on the list are not targets of NSO customers.

Bahrain’s embassy in Washington did not respond to a request for comment.

Citizen Lab’s analysis found that Tajer, the lawyer, was hacked with Pegasus spyware just one week after a previous report by the Toronto-based lab detailed nine other cases of Bahrain activists who were targeted with spyware. The researchers have also identified a journalist, who they have not named, who was also targeted with NSO spyware.

Sayed Ahmed Alwadaei, the director of advocacy at the UK-based Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy, said Bahrain had witnessed a decade of “systematic repression” since the events of 2011.

Intent on ensuring there would not be any other uprisings, Alwadaei said the government was seeking to keep all activists and political actors “within their control”.

“I guess this is really the new reality, that they want to ensure that this is not going to happen again,” Alwadaei said.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	02/18 Experts: China outpaces US cyber weapons
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/feb/18/experts-warn-china-outpaces-us-cyberwarfare-weapon/">https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/feb/18/experts-warn-china-outpaces-us-cyberwarfare-weapon/</a>
GIST	China views social media networks as tools for cyberwarfare and America does not have the defenses to fight off China in the long term, according to experts on China and cybersecurity.



Targets of Beijing's sophisticated cyberwarfare techniques include financial, energy and transportation networks, as well as national and military decision-makers, according to People's Liberation Army writings analyzed by Dean Cheng, a Heritage Foundation scholar of Chinese military capabilities.

Mr. Cheng and Winnona DeSombre, a cyber statecraft expert at the Atlantic Council, sounded the alarm about China's cyberwarfare capabilities in testimony to the U.S.-China and Economic Security Review Commission.

Mr. Cheng said China's work in what it terms the 'three warfares' of psychological warfare, public opinion warfare, and legal warfare poses a threat in the cyber domain. China's practice of integrated network and electronic warfare involves more than computers and can extend into civilian information systems and seek to wreak havoc even in peacetime.

"It is not simply zeroes and ones, it is not simply computers, it is the human element of interpreting what is on the screen," Mr. Cheng said. "Do you believe the emails on your screen? Do you believe that your email went to the right place, and conversely that the tweet, the Instagram, the TikTok actually is a reflection of reality?"

China's ability to blur the lines between reality and propaganda is not the only challenge America is facing in cyberspace.

"Based on industry observations, the U.S. does not currently have adequate cyber defenses, personnel, supply chain security, or international, technical, and standards leadership to rival China long-term in cyberspace," Ms. DeSombre told the commission. "On top of this, given how secretive cyber is as a domain, China's capabilities likely exceed the findings that I've compiled here.

Ms. DeSombre, a former security engineer at Google, said while China and the U.S. both suffer from a personnel shortage, China's military-civil fusion policies forcing cooperation with academic and corporate institutions will enable it to overcome such issues in the short term.

She said America is not as well-equipped, particularly because of clearance backlogs and policies discouraging talented professionals from entering government service.

The warnings from the China experts are intended to inform congressional action on national security and economic policy. The U.S. China and Economic Security Review Commission was created by Congress in 2000 and it publishes annual reports featuring its recommendations. Mr. Cheng and Ms. DeSombre provided testimony to commissioners selected by the leadership of the House and Senate.

During the hearing on Thursday, the commission also received testimony from experts who warned about China's improving cyberespionage capabilities. Mandiant Threat Intelligence senior manager Kelli Vanderlee said her cybersecurity firm believes China's technical tradecraft has steadily evolved since 2016 to become stealthier and more agile.

"In 2020 and 2021, we believe Chinese cyber espionage activity has demonstrated a higher tolerance for risk and is less constrained by norms or diplomatic pressures," Ms. Vanderlee said in written testimony.

Part of the reason why diplomatic pressure does not work perfectly to chasten China is because of America's failure to follow through with punishment after naming and shaming the communist country for bad actions, according to Ms. DeSombre.

"China no longer cares about whether or not it's being named and shamed if there's no imposition of costs afterward," Ms. DeSombre told the commission. "And the current sanction environment, especially when we're sanctioning individual PLA officers and the like, is not nearly as effective as we'd like it to be."

Ms. DeSombre suggested America collaborate more with its allies on developing international standards in support of a free and open internet to work to advance American values in the information domain.

## Terror Conditions

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	<b>02/20 Australia court: bushfires terrorist act?</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://au.news.yahoo.com/accused-joined-islamic-state-court-032651642.html">https://au.news.yahoo.com/accused-joined-islamic-state-court-032651642.html</a>
GIST	<p>A court is examining the circumstances around two bushfires in Melbourne's northeast, which were allegedly deliberately lit in an attempted terrorist act.</p> <p>Two brothers, Aran Sherani, 21, and Ari Sherani, aged 20, have been charged with attempting to engage in a terrorist act at Humevale on February 18 last year by lighting a fire in bushland.</p> <p>Aran Sherani has also been charged over a second fire at Kinglake 10 days later.</p> <p>In the first day of a hearing for the two brothers to determine whether they should stand trial on the charges, the court heard Aran Sherani was also a member of Islamic State and a likely danger to the community.</p> <p>The court heard senior investigators from the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning had examined the site of the Humevale blaze, but police had not made any attempt to secure the site of the fire.</p> <p>The pair were arrested in counter-terrorism raids in Melbourne last March.</p> <p>Detective Owen Matthews gave evidence that he and other counter-terrorism police were briefed that the older brother, Aran Sherani, was going to travel to a conflict zone and was potentially a danger to the community if he was unable to do so.</p> <p>Under cross-examination, Det Matthews said threats had been made against members of the public and against an Islamic leader, but conceded he did not know what those threats consisted of.</p> <p>He testified that counter-terrorism operational command had decided the danger posed by Aran Sherani had reached a "sufficient threshold" in March 2021, and during a surveillance operation he was instructed to arrest the 21 year old as he left his house in Melbourne's north.</p> <p>Aran Sherani had also bought a pair of knuckledusters and a hunting knife, according to Det Matthews, although police did not find these when they searched his house.</p> <p>He disagreed with assertions made by the defence, that he did not actually believe Aran Sherani posed any danger.</p> <p>"I received instructions ... I trusted the people back at the office were making the correct decision," Det Matthews said.</p> <p>Court documents reveal Aran Sherani is also accused of knowingly being a member of terrorist organisation ISIS, buying a knife at Epping in preparation for a terrorist attack and intentionally causing injury.</p> <p>The hearing continues in Melbourne Magistrates Court.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>02/21 Al-Shabab budgets \$24M/yr. for weapons</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.voanews.com/a/al-shabab-collects-millions-to-spend-on-weapons-report/6452825.html">https://www.voanews.com/a/al-shabab-collects-millions-to-spend-on-weapons-report/6452825.html</a>

WASHINGTON — Somalia's al-Shabab militant group has an annual budget of \$24 million to spend on purchasing weapons, a new report finds.

The report by a Mogadishu-based research group, the Hiraal Institute, said the group uses various methods to procure weapons, including direct purchases from local black markets, and from arms traders contracted to buy and deliver weapons from abroad, mainly Yemen.

Hiraal said the acquisition of firearms, ammunition, explosives and other lethal capacity weapons remains a priority for al-Shabab, with nearly a quarter of its budget going to such transactions.

"Out of an annually planned expenditure of approximately USD 100 million, al-Shabab's annual planned expenditure on arms procurement is assessed to be USD 24 million, budgeted monthly at USD 2 million," the report said.

Samira Gaid, the executive director of Hiraal Institute, told VOA Somali that during research they had access to al-Shabab's annual budget documentation. They have also interviewed former al-Shabab members, clan leaders, business owners, government officials and other sources who have knowledge of how the group functions.

"Just like the FGS [Federal Government of Somalia], the biggest chunk of its resources is currently being spent on security-related expenses; these, of course, include wages and operational costs," Gaid said. "The group also manufactures certain types of ammunition and explosives, and a certain amount of its budget goes towards that."

Al-Shabab has recently increased its attacks in Somalia as parliamentary elections continue at a sluggish pace. Since last week, the group has carried out multiple attacks in Mogadishu and the towns of Bosaso and Beledweyne.

On Monday, the group claimed responsibility for a roadside explosion, which targeted a convoy escorting Said Abdullahi Deni, the president of the semi-autonomous region of Puntland. Deni survived the attack, but two of his soldiers were killed and four others injured.

On Saturday, al-Shabab also claimed responsibility for a suicide bombing in Beledweyne in which 15 people were killed and at least 20 others injured.

To finance its operations, al-Shabab has a sophisticated extortion system which it uses to collect money from the business, agricultural, and livestock sectors, according to a 2021 [United Nations report](#) by the Panel of Experts on Somalia.

Al-Shabab as well as Islamic State militants have been collecting extortion money from businesses in Mogadishu for years. Last month, death threats from Islamic State led to the closure of some businesses that refused to pay extortion money. The stores later reopened after the government deployed security forces. Police also told the businesses they would not have the stores closed except on orders from the government.

The store closures forced Somali Prime Minister Mohamed Hussein Roble to instruct Interior Security Minister Abdullahi Mohamed Nor and the security agencies to come up with a plan to counter the terrorist threats and harassment of traders at Somalia's biggest market.

The U.N. Panel of Experts report on Somalia estimated that al-Shabab now operates around 100 checkpoints throughout the country. In one of the most profitable checkpoints north of Kismayo town, which sees an average of 30 trucks pass through in a 24-hour period, the panel reported that al-Shabab collects an estimated \$15,000 to \$30,000 per day.

	Hiraal recommended the implementation of several measures aimed at disrupting al-Shabab's weapons purchases, including the targeting of key militant explosive experts, targeting individuals involved in the arms trade and countering arms imports from the Gulf of Aden.
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>02/17 Growth, strategy of ISKP media operations</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.militantwire.com/p/the-growth-and-internationalization?utm_source=url">https://www.militantwire.com/p/the-growth-and-internationalization?utm_source=url</a>
GIST	<p>Since its nascency in 2014/2015 Afghanistan, the Islamic State Khurasan Province (ISKP) has worked to develop a robust and dynamic propaganda apparatus, thriving within a rapidly evolving South Asian media ecosystem of official and pro-Islamic State groups. ISKP has combined their insurgent operations with an intense media warfare campaign targeting its designated enemies.</p> <p>ISKP's propaganda output has increased, the productions have improved in quality, and their strategy has become more sophisticated. The group has also markedly expanded its reach and ability to communicate its messaging to targeted ethnic and linguistic groups. ISKP has historically put out content in Arabic, Pashto, and Dari; however, more recently, the branch has produced propaganda in an expanded number of languages such as Urdu, Uzbek, Tajik, and English.</p> <p><b>Expansion of ISKP Media Strategy</b></p> <p>Since its founding, the Islamic State Khurasan Province has used its propaganda machine to attack enemies such as the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, said government's international coalition allies, and the Taliban. ISKP started out impugning their foes through statements released by official branch media including Khurasan Wilayah News, Tor Bairaghuna, Al-Millat Media, Al-Azaim Foundation, and Khurasan Ghag Radio — which were all semi-official outlets — as well as several other aligned propaganda groups.</p> <p>ISKP notably bolstered its media warfare efforts after the current Emir, Shahab al-Muhajir, reportedly took charge of the organisation in mid-2020. This proliferation was exemplified by a number of statements issued by the group and signed by ISKP spokesman Sultan Aziz Ezzam, as well as through the increased production of unofficial videos, audio statements, and various forms of print materials posted online. The activity of some pro-ISKP outlets remained limited, like in the case of Sangar Media and Furqa TV; however, others like Haqeqat News and Khalid Media started to produce and disseminate online high-quality videos and statements.</p> <p>A subsequent period of discernible propaganda expansion followed the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan on August 15, 2021. ISKP ramped up its media production with dozens of books and booklets disseminated online. Al-Azaim Foundation became the group's official local media organ, publishing all its print materials, audio statements, and video productions. Much of this content has been directed at the Taliban with the aim of delegitimizing and discrediting them as a politico-religious authority. Al-Azaim has also produced content purposed to inspire ISKP fighters, encourage attacks, instill patience amongst the rank and file, and raise money for the organization. Their productions often provide religious and ideological guidance to their forces and followers.</p> <p>Not only has ISKP increased its output and introduced new publications, but the group has also begun releasing content in more languages. ISKP has started translating its books in Urdu and its audio statements in Uzbek — the latter comes as part of their <a href="#">outreach</a> to potential Uzbek supporters in the region. Likewise, Al-Azaim's Aqeedah and Manhaj lessons are translated into Uzbek, and, last month, Al-Azaim also started to issue audio productions in the Uzbek language about the life of Asadulloh Urganchiy, a former Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) ideologue.</p> <p>These lessons are published with the official Al-Azaim Foundation logo in the Uzbek channel Aqida Darsliklari. Segments of these audio statements are then translated into the Tajik language and shared on the same channel, most of them addressing religious matters and calling for support of the establishment of the Islamic State in the area, rejecting those who believe in polytheism, secularism, and nationalism. ISKP propaganda in the Tajik language remains limited, but it is worth noting that in July of last year, a video was published showing ISKP militants who attacked Jalalabad prison in August 2020, which was a great</p>

	<p>operational success for the group as it freed several of its captive members. Among them, a young Tajik man threatened the “taghuti” government of Tajikistan with future attacks.</p> <p>Pro-Islamic State propagandists have also been producing Hindi translations. Similar to Urdu-language media Nida-e Haqq, which translates all IS claims into Urdu, Al-Qitaal regularly publishes translations of official IS material into Hindi. While these channels are not formally linked to the Islamic State’s Afghanistan branch, their contents are shared in the same channels where ISKP publications are featured. Furthermore, a new pro-ISKP channel, Weekly Khilafat, has emerged and started to issue semi-official translations of al-Naba newsletters in Urdu and Hindi. Propaganda in the Bengali language is also shared in pro-ISKP channels through the Al-Burhan outlet.</p> <p>Another notable sign of ISKP’s increasingly internationalized propaganda strategy is Al-Azaim Foundation’s decision to put the time, manpower, and resources into publishing both a magazine and a book in English, the world’s most-spoken language. With two such productions released in such short order, in late January and early February respectively, it is likely that ISKP will continue putting out English language content.</p> <p>ISKP’s outreach strategy is designed to reach new sympathizers, attract disaffected members from other jihadi groups, and inspire militant elements belonging to targeted ethnic groups to conduct attacks in the countries where they reside. The organization is consolidating its support base, while also working to increase its ability to project power and influence through its media apparatus.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>02/21 Followers: join ISIS North America in US</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.hstoday.us/featured/isis-supporters-in-the-united-states-urged-to-join-isis-north-america/">https://www.hstoday.us/featured/isis-supporters-in-the-united-states-urged-to-join-isis-north-america/</a>
GIST	<p>A video posted online urges followers of the Islamic State to help form a province of the terror group in the United States called ISIS North America.</p> <p>The video is dated “new 2022” in the first frame and was posted on a file-sharing site this month. It consists of simple white English-language writing on a black background, instead of being dressed up with images of ISIS battles or adherents as in many videos with higher production value associated with the terror group.</p> <p>Propaganda including videos, magazines, online memes, instructional leaflets, etc., is produced both through official ISIS channels and — more prolifically since the fall of the declared caliphate in Iraq and Syria — by independent groups and lone actors waging what they call “media jihad.” Regardless of the production source, this ISIS-supporting propaganda is intended to recruit, threaten, and incite, with a particular emphasis on urging followers to use accessible weapons and attack soft targets on their home turf.</p> <p>“To those who want to try,” it begins with an ISIS flag as a nasheed plays. “To my brothers following in the path of the Khilafa in America I urge you to come join our group.”</p> <p>“This new group will operate in the United States to surprise the murtad in their own lands,” the video continues. The wording suggests that the group intends to target Muslims seen as turning their back on ISIS’ interpretation of Islam — how the terror group defines apostasy — instead of the general population, referred to as kuffar or disbelievers.</p> <p>“The name of this group will be named ISIS-NA (Islamic State of Iraq &amp; Sham – North America),” the video states. It then shows imaginings of the Nevada and California flags as “Flag of Tawheed” — the concept of oneness in Islam and why ISIS followers make the hand gesture of raising a single index finger.</p> <p>The video says that it was linked in the comment section of Islamic State videos on the file-sharing site, assuring viewers that if they followed the link and arrived at the video “you are at the right place.”</p>

“Do not send this video anywhere else as this will alert the kuffar. Do not join if you aren’t committed [sic] to our organization and do not join to make jokes, we will trace every keylog you make if you do this,” it continues.

“My dear brother or sister, may Allah grant you good health and happiness for watching this video. Spread the word about this organization to those who are trustful but be careful with doing so,” the video cautions. “May Allah grant this organization with success and may Allah grant us Jannah [paradise].”

The video was posted by a user called “Cell of the IS,” and one of the tags on the post is Al-Furat Media Center, an official ISIS outlet that was launched in 2015 to distribute Russian-language ISIS propaganda as well as other regional languages. The only ISIS province noted in the tags is Khorasan, referring to the group in Afghanistan and the surrounding region. “Brothers do not spread this video,” it adds in the video description.

In its first English-language magazine recently released online, ISIS Khorasan declared that theirs is the “most important province” of ISIS after Iraq and Syria.

The push to ensure ISIS ranks and accompanying visuals extend far beyond the territory of the former physical caliphate began many years ago, as the terror group saw value in encouraging the formation of provinces that could recruit, train, and attack close to home. In a November 2016 audio message, late ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi referred to ISIS units in regions such as Afghanistan, the Caucasus, Indonesia, Philippines, Sinai, Bangladesh, West Africa and North Africa as the “base of the caliphate,” and warned that “kuffar [disbelievers] will try to split you.”

ISIS’ official weekly newsletter al-Naba is largely dedicated to posting updates from different provinces, and some of these regional groups also distribute content through their own media outlets.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	<b>02/20 Offline versus online radicalization</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://gnet-research.org/2022/02/21/offline-versus-online-radicalisation-which-is-the-bigger-threat/">https://gnet-research.org/2022/02/21/offline-versus-online-radicalisation-which-is-the-bigger-threat/</a>
GIST	<p>Governments, social media companies and the general public are becoming increasingly concerned about the threat of those who are radicalised online and turn to violent extremism. However, the evidence base for this concern is not fully formed. For instance, it is not yet clear if those who are being radicalised offline are still the greater threat. It is particularly important to explore this issue empirically, as large amounts of material resources from both the public and the private sectors may be redirected from offline to online initiatives. This report seeks to explore the differences in outcomes for those who have been primarily radicalised offline versus those radicalised online.</p> <p>It does so by creating a new database with a novel coding system. The database contains information regarding every completed and most of the thwarted jihadist-linked attacks in eight Western countries (Australia, Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States) over a seven year period from 1 January 2014 to 1 January 2021. The database contains 245 completed or thwarted attacks by some 439 individuals. For every perpetrator, the database contains information on how they were radicalised (mostly online; mostly offline; both; “asocially” online; and unknown – see chart in methodology section for definitional breakdown). It also contains information on target type and location, outcome of attack (completed; thwarted), lethality of attack (deaths; injuries), lone/group factors, mode of attack (bomb; shooting; knife; and so on), terrorist organisational connections (inspired or orchestrated by IS or al-Qaeda or another group), demographics of attackers (gender; age; education; ethnic origin; socio-economic status; and so on).</p> <p>The sample of perpetrators and attacks was drawn from existing databases for terrorist attacks, including the START Global Terrorism Database, the George Washington’s Program on Extremism database of attacks in the West, the French National Assembly’s database of terrorist attacks in France, the UK’s Independent Reviewer’s database of Terrorism, the database of plots in Spain from Observatorio Terrorismo and Seguridad Internacional, and more. In addition to the information contained in these</p>



databases, we identified further attacks and plots through open-source research. This included access to court documents from each of the countries in the database. Moreover, we conducted dozens of interviews with police investigators, family members and friends of attackers, lawyers and others close to the cases.

Our findings suggest that the primary threat comes from those who have mostly been radicalised offline. More than half of the individuals in our database were radicalised mostly offline versus a significantly smaller number who were radicalised mostly online (54% vs 18%). Individuals radicalised mostly offline were significantly more likely to complete their attacks than those who were radicalised online (29% vs 12%). However, we found that the number of people being radicalised online has increased over the last seven years, primarily in the youth demographic. Nonetheless, even in this demographic online radicalisation has not surpassed offline radicalisation.

Cases of online asocial radicalisation (by which we mean exposure to online propaganda with no known social interaction) accounted for only 2% of cases. Foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) were equally as likely to carry out their attacks as non-foreign terrorist fighters (29% and 28%, respectively). More than 60% of completed attacks were committed by lone actors (67%). The best completion rate was for individuals who were radicalised offline and acted alone (60% completed an attack). Most individuals fitting this profile were either known to the police and/or under surveillance (68%) and had a criminal record or had been imprisoned (74%). A significant proportion of them were foreign fighters (26%). Nonetheless, 35% had radicalised friends or family even though they attacked alone.

Groups, regardless of radicalisation setting, achieved a significantly lower completion rate (15%). Even those who radicalised offline but attacked in groups had a low completion rate (19%), which is three times lower than lone actors who were radicalised offline but completed their attacks.

Yet people who had been radicalised offline acting in groups were 15% more lethal than when they attacked alone. Under half of these group actors were under surveillance or known to counter-terror (CT) police (44%, 1.5 times less likely to have been under surveillance or known to CT police than offline-radicalised lone actors who completed their attacks) or had been in prison previously (47%). People who had been radicalised online, both singly and in groups, accounted for only 12% of successful attacks.

Unlike other studies, our database consists of only those who have completed an attack or were thwarted before being able to do so. Therefore, it gives a more accurate picture of the actual threat landscape over seven years in eight Western countries than studies based on surveys or less representative sampling techniques. Our findings show that the primary threat still comes from those who have been radicalised offline. Offline-radicalised individuals are greater in number, better at evading detection by security officials, more likely to complete a terrorist attack successfully and more deadly when they do so.

[Return to Top](#)

Click on link to download PDF for full report: <https://gnet-research.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/GNET-Report-Offline-Versus-Online-Radicalisation.pdf>

HEADLINE	02/21 Exodus from Syria's one-time IS capital
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/poverty-fear-drive-exodus-syrias-time-capital-83036444">https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/poverty-fear-drive-exodus-syrias-time-capital-83036444</a>
GIST	<p>RAQQA, Syria -- In a square that a few years ago was a grim stage for the Islamic State group's brutal rule in the Syrian city of Raqqa, Mahmoud Dander sat deep in thought.</p> <p>He wants to leave Syria, but has a problem: The 75-year-old has no money. He recalled the old days before protests and wars led to his country's collapse and national currency crash: Syria wasn't thriving back then, but he had work, his children had university degrees and decent futures, and food was always on the table.</p> <p>That's all gone now. "We have fallen, just like our currency," he said.</p> <p>Raqqa, the former de facto capital of the self-proclaimed IS caliphate and home to about 300,000 people, is now free, but many of its residents try to leave. Those with property are trying to sell it to save up for the journey to Turkey. Those without money struggle to get by.</p>



At least 3,000 people left Raqqa for Turkey in 2021, according to the city's civil council co-chair Mohammed Nour.

Their reasons span the spectrum of post-war life in Syria, one of the world's most complex conflict zones. They include economic collapse and widespread unemployment following one of the worst years of drought, as well as fears of an IS comeback and a proliferation of criminal gangs. And there is the looming specter of conflict between rival powers that control various parts of northern Syria, including Turkey, Russia and Syrian government forces.

On the surface, the city's slow recovery from IS rule is evident. Cafes and restaurant are full of patrons. Kurdish-led forces stand guard at every major intersection.

But poverty is rampant in the majority Arab city administered by U.S.-backed Kurdish-led forces. People line up for basics such as bread. Unemployed young men sit around. Water and electricity are limited. Many live among bombed-out ruins. Local officials say at least 30% of the city remains destroyed.

Poverty and unemployment drive young men into the arms of IS. Kurdish investigators say new IS recruits captured last month had been lured by money. At the same time, the Kurdish-led city administration received applications from 27,000 job seekers last year, but had no jobs.

Milhem Daher, a 35-year-old engineer, is in the process of selling his home, businesses and properties to pay a smuggler to take him and his family of eight to Turkey, a key route for Syrian migrants trying to win asylum in Europe.

He plans to leave as soon as he has enough money.

Daher had survived Raqqa's recent violent history, including the outbreak of Syria's civil war in 2011, and the 2014 takeover by IS militants who turned the city into the capital of their caliphate spanning parts of Syria and Iraq. A U.S.-led coalition dropped thousands of bombs on the once vibrant city to drive out IS, liberating it in 2017. IS lost its last territorial foothold in Syria in 2019.

Daher emerged from the dark chapter ready to invest, but said he faced many obstacles, including a lack of resources and export markets. "If you sell to locals, it won't generate profit," he said.

For his first project, Daher bought seeds to cultivate vegetables. When it was time to harvest, traders weren't interested in paying the asking price.

He purchased trucks to lift rubble amid reconstruction efforts. But the quality of the vehicles quickly degraded as a result of poor fuel in the market and lack of materials for upkeep. A potato chip factory and internet service company also floundered.

Finally, Daher bought livestock, but a devastating drought led to shortages in animal feed. His cattle died.

Now he is selling off what remains of these failed businesses to start a new life. He needs \$10,000.

In Raqqa, having money can also be a problem as kidnappings-for-ransom are on the rise.

Real estate developer Imam al-Hasan, 37, was taken from his home and held for days by attackers in military fatigues. To secure his release, he paid \$400,000, money belonging to him and traders who trusted him with their life savings. He complained to the local authorities, but he said nothing was done. A month after the ordeal, bruises are still visible on his face and legs.

Al-Hasan, too, is selling his home and belongings. "There is nothing left for me here," he said.

Two of Al-Hasan's relatives who left in September and recently arrived in Europe said that apart from economic uncertainty it was the threat of more violence that pushed them to leave.

“At any moment the situation could explode, how can I stay there?” said Ibrahim, 27. He and Mohammed, 41, spoke under the condition that only their first names be used, citing security concerns for their wives and children still living in the city.

Like many others, their journey from northeastern Syria to Europe began via tunnels along the town of Ras al-Ain, which straddles the border with Turkey.

The smuggler had charged \$2,000 per person. From there, the path to Europe was riddled with risk.

Ibrahim arrived in Germany last week after an arduous journey that began in Belarus. Mohammed walked for treacherous miles before setting off for Greece by boat. He ended up in The Netherlands in October.

Mohammed is waiting for a chance to bring his family from Raqqa to Europe, he said in a phone interview. For now, he is without work.

Back in Raqqa, Reem al-Ani, 70, prepares tea for two. Her son is the only one of four children who has remained in Syria. The others are spread across the world.

The stairs leading to their apartment are riddled with bullet holes, remnants of battles to dislodge IS. The ceilings are charred from smoke.

She has grown accustomed to a silent house. “I miss them,” she said of her children.

Nearby, in Naim Square, the elderly Dander says he barely makes ends meet, surviving on his rapidly diminishing pension from his previous government job.

His three children have university degrees in engineering and literature, and one was a teacher, he said. But none have been able to find work. He wishes he had the money to help them leave.

“I spend every day thinking about how to get out,” he said.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	<b>02/20 Female Afghan judges fled to Australia exile</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/feb/20/the-taliban-want-revenge-afghanistans-female-judges-in-exile-in-australia">https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/feb/20/the-taliban-want-revenge-afghanistans-female-judges-in-exile-in-australia</a>
GIST	<p>It was the toughest decision these judges ever made. To flee Afghanistan, the country they love and spent years working to rebuild. To leave behind the familiarity of family and friends for new, unknown lives on the other side of the world.</p> <p>A sentence of exile, to save their lives.</p> <p>In mid-August, amid the chaos of the US armed forces’ abrupt pullout from Afghanistan, female judges and prosecutors faced a perilous future.</p> <p>Key actors in the country’s fragile justice system, they had jailed high-profile terrorists, drug barons and violent criminals.</p> <p>Overnight, with the withdrawal of foreign forces and the fall of Kabul, they were left exposed and vulnerable to deadly reprisals.</p>

“At 10am I was at work in Kabul. At 11am I got a phone call: ‘The Taliban are in control. They are looking for you, go home and hide,’” said Farah Altaf Atahee, who fled with her husband and three children.

The Guardian met Atahee and other female judges in mid-December in Athens, where they had been evacuated from Afghanistan and were awaiting relocation to new homes.

Fifteen judges and their families – a cohort of about 70 people – have now been resettled in Australia.

As she recounted the events of the day the Taliban seized power in Kabul, Atahee fought back tears. She said she realised that thousands of recently released prisoners, including Taliban leaders and heroin traffickers, the violent criminals she had sent to jail, wanted revenge on her and other judicial officers.

“Everything we worked for, everything we had, gone,” she said, from the Melissa office, an Athens-based NGO supporting refugees. “My home, my family, my work, my life, my savings, all gone, in less than an hour.”

Thirty-one-year-old Mahtab Fazl tells a similar story. She escaped Afghanistan’s Herat city with her husband and two young boys, but fears still for the family they were forced to leave behind.

“Because of my job as a judge, every day they are facing risks, they’re in danger,” she said. “We need to get them out of Afghanistan.”

Australia has committed to taking in some of these women and their families as part of its humanitarian pledges to support Afghan allies and vulnerable people. But the seemingly generous offer for help is increasingly looking inadequate.

A Department of Home Affairs spokesman said female judges would be processed as part of an “agreement of 3,000 places allocated to Afghan nationals within its 13,750-humanitarian visa quota” for 2021-22.

A Senate inquiry report tabled earlier this month on the withdrawal from Afghanistan, and its response to the fall of Kabul to the Taliban, labelled Australia’s actions as “dishonourable”. The inquiry found former Afghan interpreters for the Australian military, and other colleagues left behind, were at a high risk of brutal reprisals.

The Australian immigration minister, Alex Hawke, has announced 15,000 places, over four years, for Afghans through its humanitarian and family visa program. Again, though, that figure, which at first glance looked generous, appears to be repackaging of old commitments to humanitarian visas that predated the Taliban seizing power in Kabul. Some critics go further – they say the number of visas the government is now offering vulnerable Afghans is actually lower than previously allocated.

Solicitor Sarah Dale, director of the Sydney-based Refugee Advice and Casework Service, said Australia could offer 20,000 additional humanitarian visas that were “easily manageable” as pandemic travel restrictions have freed up resources in the system.

“After 20 years of military engagement, of commitments to the people of Afghanistan, why are we not offering more to those left behind?” she said. “We’ve turned our back on our moral obligations to do more.”

Dale said the government’s announcement of 5,000 places in the family stream over four years was less than what was granted previously.

“The 10,000 humanitarian visas, over four years, must not include those already evacuated, as it would leave fewer additional places,” she said.

The London-based International Bar Association (IBA) Human Rights Institute had dedicated years supporting Afghanistan to professionalise its legal fraternity. Director Baroness Helena Kennedy, QC, said judicial officers faced potentially deadly reprisals.

“These women were in mortal danger and facing imminent death when we evacuated them,” she said.

She said the IBA was still negotiating with the Australian government to add five more judges and their families to Australia’s resettlement quota, in fulfilment of an original agreement to accept 20 judges and their families.

But, even now in the relative comfort and safety of Sydney, Atahee remains conflicted.

“My anxiety is about my family, they are so afraid,” she said. “The Taliban want revenge, especially for women judges.”

Another judge, whom the Guardian has chosen not to name because she fears retribution for family still in Afghanistan, said her four children, mother and husband are now in a Melbourne hotel waiting to find a home of their own.

“We spend every day hoping Afghanistan goes back to normal, and hoping we can go back one day,” she said. “Afghanistan is our home, all we can do is hope it gets better,” she said.

Asked about her first impressions of Melbourne, Mahtab Fazl said: “It looks great. Weather, people, food, everything is good.”.

One thing all the Afghan women repeated was the hope for their children to start school as soon as possible.

“We want a bright future for our children,” Fazl said. “We see this future is now in Australia.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	<b>02/20 MI5: Afghanistan breeding ground jihadis</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10533393/Afghanistan-breeding-ground-jihadis-months-Wests-withdrawal-MI5-chief-warns.html">https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10533393/Afghanistan-breeding-ground-jihadis-months-Wests-withdrawal-MI5-chief-warns.html</a>
GIST	<p><b>Afghanistan</b> is again becoming a breeding ground for terror, with British extremists already trying to travel there, the head of MI5 has warned.</p> <p>Ken McCallum said he is concerned about ‘terrorist infrastructure and networks reconstituting’ in the troubled country just months after the West’s catastrophic withdrawal.</p> <p>In September, he warned that MI5 was braced for an ‘increase in inspired terrorism’ and the ‘potential regrowth of Al Qaeda-style directed plots’ as the <b>Taliban</b>’s takeover of Afghanistan had ‘heartened and emboldened’ extremists.</p> <p>Now the director general of the domestic spy agency has revealed that it has detected the ‘beginnings of some travel attempts’ by aspiring jihadis in the UK.</p> <p>In an interview with the Daily Mail, Mr McCallum warned that terror groups may be able to reform in Afghanistan and plan sophisticated operations targeting the UK.</p> <p>He said that in September, he had ‘flagged two risks’, one of which was the ‘immediate morale boost that Afghanistan would give to extremists here’.</p> <p>The second was ‘the slower burn risk of terrorist groups reconstituting themselves within Afghanistan and projecting the threat back at the West including the UK’.</p>

Mr McCallum continued: ‘We have seen versions of both of those risks beginning to materialise.’

He suggested that the region could become a magnet for British extremists in a similar way to Syria, where hundreds flocked to join the Islamic State terror group.

The spy chief said: ‘Clearly we have seen some people interested in travelling to Afghanistan in pursuit of some of those goals.

‘We have seen the beginnings of some travel attempts and so with our partners we remain very vigilant.’

Until the West’s chaotic abandonment of Afghanistan last August, efforts to combat the terrorist threat there had been largely successful over the last decade.

But Mr McCallum said there is a risk of the return of sophisticated large-scale plots intended to cause mass casualties, such as the thwarted 2006 plan to detonate liquid explosives on seven transatlantic aircraft taking off from Heathrow.

He revealed in Saturday’s Mail that MI5 is facing tough decisions because the threat from hostile states such as Russia and China now rivals terrorism, and said outdated laws made it impossible to prosecute foreign spies in this country.

In a wide-ranging interview, Mr McCallum also spoke about the enduring threat of a biological attack on Britain.

He said: ‘Al Qaeda, for example, determinedly engaged in research and development. This is never something which has gone away as a risk.’ Mr McCallum added that the global impact of the Covid pandemic may also have inspired potential terrorists.

‘It will have occurred to many people that biological or viral or their agents can be tools of significant game-changing events,’ he said. ‘It does not automatically follow that anyone having that thought has the wherewithal to do something intelligent about it.

‘But this has always been one of the risks that we are mindful of and seek to manage.’

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	<b>02/19 DHS: all Afghan evacuees released in US</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/feb/19/dhs-has-now-released-all-76000-afghan-evacuees-mil/">https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/feb/19/dhs-has-now-released-all-76000-afghan-evacuees-mil/</a>
GIST	<p>Homeland Security announced the departure of the last Afghan evacuees from military bases on U.S. soil Saturday, saying 76,000 of them have been processed and released into American communities.</p> <p>A base in New Jersey became the last to shut down its migrant camp, ending a critical period in the evacuation efforts just a week shy of the six-month mark of the end of the chaotic airlift that accompanied the end of U.S. operations in Afghanistan.</p> <p>Officials are now looking to set up a new location to handle future Afghans who are able to make it out of their home country and who are deemed to be eligible for resettlement in the U.S., but for now, Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst in New Jersey will take any newcomers that do emerge from the struggling country.</p> <p>The airlift and housing here in the U.S.; was dubbed Operation Allies Welcome, and was billed as a chance to help Afghans who risked their lives to assist the 20-year U.S. war effort and are in line for the Special Immigrant Visa. In reality, most of those airlifted out do not appear to qualify for the special visa, but had other ties to the U.S., or were simply in a better position to reach the airport in Kabul amid the Taliban takeover in August.</p>

They were brought to third countries and given a once-over by American officials before being airlifted to migrant camps in eight military bases across the U.S.

The final two of those camps emptied out this week.

Homeland Security insists those who made it to the U.S. faced “rigorous, multi-layered screening.”

But a new investigation by the Pentagon’s inspector general this week found serious holes in the process. The audit said information from several Defense Department systems was excluded from the database checks, which allowed dozens of people with “significant security concerns” to reach the U.S.

Many of those were released, or walked off the military bases before officials realized the security breach, and the government was having a tough time tracking them down, the inspector general reported.

“Not being able to locate Afghan evacuees with derogatory information quickly and accurately could pose a security risk to the United States,” the audit concluded.

The botched database checks come on top of earlier revelations that most evacuees reached the U.S. without going through in-person interviews. That marks a departure from the usual processing Afghans would have had to face, and experts describe the interview as a crucial security step, where trained people sniff out bogus or dangerous claims.

Sen. Tom Cotton, Arkansas Republican, called the new revelation about botched database checks a “debacle.”

“Joe Biden promised to vet the evacuees that came to America after his retreat from Afghanistan. But he didn’t, and now American lives are at risk,” he said in a statement.

Most Afghan evacuees were brought to the U.S. on Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas’s say-so, under his powers of “humanitarian parole.”

That is a short-term legal status that allows them to live and work in the country, with a chance to try to secure a more permanent status such as seeking asylum or completing the special visa process.

Most are expected to attempt to claim asylum, but there could be hiccups.

One asylum officer ruled in a case last month against an evacuee, finding that while conditions in Afghanistan may be rough, the evacuee didn’t personally face any threats from the Taliban government.

“Despite country reports indicating that the Taliban are openly targeting people and their family members, you do not seem to fall within the realm of the people they are targeting due to the work you did with the United States government as a mechanic, and the fact that no one in your family still living in Afghanistan have been harmed, threatened or questions about you,” the asylum officer wrote in a “Notice of Intent to Deny” that has caught the attention of immigration lawyers.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	<b>02/20 Taliban seek private sector economic aid</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/taliban-looks-to-private-sector-to-save-afghanistans-economy-from-collapse-11645353000?mod=hp_lead_pos3">https://www.wsj.com/articles/taliban-looks-to-private-sector-to-save-afghanistans-economy-from-collapse-11645353000?mod=hp_lead_pos3</a>
GIST	<p>KABUL—With its economy in free fall, the Taliban is banking on private enterprise to rescue Afghanistan’s people and solidify its regime.</p> <p>That will be tough for a country under international sanctions, with <a href="#">its banks paralyzed</a>, poverty reaching near-universal levels and little confidence among the population in what the future holds.</p>

When the Taliban [seized power in August](#), the international aid that made up about 40% of its GDP evaporated. Taliban officials have now cast that as an opportunity.

“Afghanistan cannot rely on aid forever,” acting Deputy Prime Minister Abdul Salam Hanafi told a conference of diplomats and United Nations officials at the Presidential Palace in Kabul last month, where the Taliban spelled out its economic ideas for the first time, which included low taxes and light regulation.

“We need an indigenous, strong and dynamic economy that relies more on domestic capacity,” he said. “Our long-term goals are the economic self-sufficiency of the Afghan economy.”

The Taliban says it has eliminated the corruption that riddled the U.S.-backed government, and, with the war now over, two major obstacles for business have been removed. They are inviting international investment, particularly in the sectors that are seen as having the most immediate potential to drive economic activity—agriculture, mining and transit trade.

The Taliban has prepared the first national budget in 20 years that contains [no foreign assistance](#), which had in recent years paid for 75% of public expenditures. They are collecting about as much in [customs revenues](#) as the U.S.-backed government and while trade is lower, less money is being siphoned off, the Taliban says. For the full year, the Taliban is aiming at \$1.8 billion in government revenues.

Nurturing this private-sector vision is Deputy Finance Minister Nazir Kabiri, one of the most senior government officials from the ousted administration still in office. A 39-year-old former University of Kentucky Fulbright scholar, he has become an interlocutor with the international community, but he is also explaining the outside world’s thinking to the Taliban.

Mr. Kabiri said he convinced the Taliban to retain the public financial-management systems at the ministry that have been built up over the past 20 years, including the computer system that centrally logs customs revenues as they are collected.

“Grants to the government aren’t coming back anytime soon, so we should turn this crisis into an opportunity and break away from the past dependency on aid,” Mr. Kabiri said. “The government is blocked, sanctioned, but there are no sanctions on Afghan businessmen and the market. And women too are allowed to work in the private sector.”

He said he helped persuade the Taliban to let international aid groups work unimpeded in the country, a commitment that allowed [relief to begin flowing again last fall](#). The regime has come to an arrangement with Washington and the U.N. that allows aid dollars to enter the country without going through the central bank. Under the deal, funds are flown in, deposited in a private Afghan bank, and then used by the U.N. More than \$350 million has arrived.

The Taliban [hasn’t made it easy for the international community](#) to help. The finance minister, who handled the group’s money when fighting the insurgency, is under international terrorism sanctions, as are many other top officials such as the interior minister. Older girls have so far been barred from attending school, while female civil servants haven’t been allowed to return to work.

For now, international aid will help Afghans survive this winter. The U.N. has made its biggest-ever emergency appeal, for \$4.4 billion, to help 24 million Afghans in 2022 with everything from food to healthcare. It is part of the [\\$8 billion it hopes to raise this year](#) to maintain public services and stabilize the economy.

The International Monetary Fund forecasts that the Afghan economy will shrink by nearly a third this year. The \$8 billion could create 180,000 jobs in the formal sector and another 500,000 jobs in the informal economy, the U.N. estimates. Getting economic activity going is also key, experts say, in preventing a large-scale exodus of Afghans abroad.



When the Taliban took over, Washington [froze the international reserves of Afghanistan's central bank](#), leaving the institution nonfunctional. Earlier this month, the U.S. said it would allow half of the \$7 billion to be used for humanitarian aid and helping to revive the economy. The other half of the bank's frozen assets will be [set aside as potential compensation](#) for victims of the 9/11 attacks. The Taliban has condemned that move as theft.

The U.S. has pledged more than \$500 million in aid since August. It has provided exemptions to sanctions to allow for aid, although the carve-outs don't apply to the private sector, apart from personal remittances.

Tom West, the U.S. special representative for Afghanistan, said addressing the humanitarian and economic crisis was the most urgent priority, and that the U.S. is considering further steps to support the economy. That could include using [\\$3.5 billion released from the reserves](#) to recapitalize the central bank, he said, adding that the bank would first need to be run by professionals and made independent. The bank is currently being run by a member of the Taliban.

The economy is desperately short of local currency and dollars. Banks are severely restricting withdrawals, and Afghan entrepreneurs with money parked outside can't get it into the country. Even aid organizations can't bring enough funds in, according to a report by the Norwegian Refugee Council last month.

Some \$900 million of the frozen central bank reserves consists of deposits of Afghan commercial banks, according to William Byrd, a senior expert at U.S. Institute of Peace.

"If there's a private-sector collapse on top of everything else, that will just make the humanitarian situation a lot worse," he said.

Afghanistan has been dependent on foreign resources of one kind or another for hundreds of years, except for brief periods, Mr. Byrd said. The U.S. alone has [pumped \\$145 billion of economic aid](#) into Afghanistan since 2001—more in today's dollars than it spent on rebuilding Europe after World War II under the Marshall Plan, according to the U.S. Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction. Yet Afghanistan was the poorest country in Asia, by far, when the Taliban took over.

Torek Farhadi, an ex-IMF official who once served as an adviser to the former government of President Hamid Karzai, said that corruption was genuinely down in Afghanistan.

"You cannot get the economy of a country going with humanitarian aid. You have to normalize the economy," Mr. Farhadi said. "It's a good time to invest in Afghanistan if sanctions are lifted."

Afghanistan will likely become even poorer, said Adnan Mazarei, a senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics, a think tank in Washington. The country doesn't have much industry, and a services sector that had grown around the foreign presence is now withering, he said.

"What is Afghanistan going to produce in the near future?" said Mr. Mazarei. "The story isn't likely to have a good ending."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	<b>02/19 Somalia restaurant bombing kills 15</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://apnews.com/article/africa-explosions-somalia-al-shabab-23f154b8c01531c7bfca7ce2cc373531">https://apnews.com/article/africa-explosions-somalia-al-shabab-23f154b8c01531c7bfca7ce2cc373531</a>
GIST	<p>MOGADISHU, Somalia (AP) — Police say at least 15 people are dead after a suicide bomber detonated an explosive vest at a crowded restaurant during lunch hour in Beledweyne, the capital of Somalia's Hiran region.</p> <p>The dead were mostly civilians, and 20 other people were wounded, police spokesman Dini Roble Ahmed told The Associated Press by phone.</p> <p>The blast caused "huge damage," he said.</p>

	The al-Shabab extremist group claimed responsibility.
	The explosion comes amid Somalia's long-delayed and often tense election process.
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>02/19 IS-linked jihadists kill 40 civilians in Mali</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/19/islamic-state-linked-jihadists-kill-dozens-civilians-mali-amid-turf-war">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/19/islamic-state-linked-jihadists-kill-dozens-civilians-mali-amid-turf-war</a>
GIST	<p>An Islamic State-linked group has killed around 40 civilians caught up in a rivalry between warring jihadist groups in Mali's conflict-plagued north.</p> <p>There were "at least 40 civilian deaths in three different sites" during a week of bloodshed in the Tessit area near the borders of Burkina Faso and Niger, a civilian official in the area told AFP.</p> <p>The official said the death toll was provisional because information was patchy and coming in slowly from the remote and dangerous area.</p> <p>"These civilians had been accused by one [jihadist] group of complicity with the other group," the official said.</p> <p>Two Tessit residents, based in the regional capital Gao and the national capital Bamako, confirmed the scale of the violence after speaking with witnesses who had fled the carnage.</p> <p>A spokesman for a group of armed northern militias reported a similar death toll.</p> <p>The latest bloodshed comes in a week when France and its European partners <a href="#">announced they would start withdrawing their forces</a> after more than nine years fighting a jihadist insurgency.</p> <p>Tessit is in the "three borders" area, a hotspot of jihadist violence.</p> <p>The Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (EIGS) and the Sahel's largest jihadist alliance, the al-Qaida-aligned GSIM group, are particularly active in the area.</p> <p>As well as attacking local and foreign troops, they have been fighting each other for territory since 2020. Three local sources, including the northern militia spokesman, said GSIM fighters went to several villages near Tessit, including Keygourouten, Bakal and Tadjalalt, between 8-10 February.</p> <p>Accusing the local shopkeepers of supplying EIGS, the GSIM fighters ransacked a health centre, a pharmacy, a water tower and a shop, as well as stealing an ambulance.</p> <p>The GSIM fighters also ordered the residents to leave. Between 150 and 200 households fled to Niger and surrounding towns.</p> <p>Then on Monday and Tuesday, EIGS fighters arrived in the same villages.</p> <p>"They accused the men of being accomplices of GSIM. They killed the old men and the young men," the official in the Tessit area said.</p> <p>Thirty were executed in Tadjalalt, the official said.</p> <p>It is a common scenario, the official added, saying that "when a [jihadist] group passes through a village, the one that comes later accuses the residents of being accomplices".</p>

	Mali's ruling junta, which <a href="#">seized power in a coup in 2020</a> after rising public outrage about elected leaders' inability to stem the jihadist bloodshed, has yet to speak about the Tessit violence.
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>02/18 Pentagon audit: security risk Afghans in US</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/feb/18/pentagon-audit-says-dozens-of-potentially-dangerou/">https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/feb/18/pentagon-audit-says-dozens-of-potentially-dangerou/</a>
GIST	<p>Afghan evacuees made it to U.S. soil without being checked through all the government's security databases, an inspector general reported Thursday in a devastating investigation that confirms critics' worst fears about the program.</p> <p>After rerunning some of the names, officials spotted at least 50 Afghans with "potentially significant security concerns" who made it the U.S. despite the Biden administration's assurances to the contrary.</p> <p>Making matters worse, the government appears to have lost track of most of them inside the U.S., the Defense Department's inspector general said. It looked at a sampling of 31 security risk evacuees identified as of Sept. 17 and found only three could be located.</p> <p>Tens of thousands more names remain to be checked, the inspector general said.</p> <p>"Not being able to locate Afghan evacuees with derogatory information quickly and accurately could pose a security risk to the United States," the audit concluded.</p> <p>Louisville fund that bailed out accused shooter backed by Democratic fundraising network Investigators said a key set of Defense Department databases was off-limits to the vetting team in the early months of the evacuation effort, because of agreements the Pentagon had with other countries. Eventually, officials developed a workaround.</p> <p>But the lapse confirmed what critics had warned.</p> <p>"I expressed concern about the administration's lackluster efforts to screen evacuees flooding from the terrorist safe haven. According to a new report by the Pentagon watchdog, the situation is far worse than we thought," said Sen. Charles E. Grassley, the top Republican on the Senate Judiciary Committee.</p> <p>He said the report should put a halt to talk of speeding up citizenship or other permanent legal opportunities for the evacuees.</p> <p>Fears of what may be lurking among the 76,000 evacuees who made it to the U.S. have been lurking since the chaotic days of the airlift.</p> <p>Billed as a chance to save people who worked with the U.S. military, the majority of the airlift evacuees actually lacked those ties. Some assisted other U.S. agencies or American media organizations, but others were, according to one evacuation advocacy group, shopkeepers and businesspeople from Kabul who were lucky enough to make it to the airport on time.</p> <p>Thousands of actual U.S. military allies, meanwhile, were stranded.</p> <p>Most of the evacuees were also brought to the U.S. without facing an in-person interview — a key step that they would have had to face had they come as refugees or under the Special Immigrant Visa program. Experts say the interview is critical to weeding out potential bad actors.</p> <p>Instead, the evacuees were brought to third countries and subjected to database checks, based on their fingerprints and whatever biographic information they chose to share.</p> <p>"We screen and vet individuals before they board planes to travel to the United States and that screening and vetting process is an ongoing one and multi-layered," Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said in September, defending the process.</p>

	<p>But the inspector general's report punctures those claims, saying that while Homeland Security, which took the lead in vetting, was checking its own databases, it didn't initially have access to the Defense Department's Automated Biometric Identification System or some intelligence databases located on the Secret Internet Protocol network.</p> <p>The Defense Department played only a supporting role in vetting, but had a bigger role in housing the evacuees once on U.S. soil, stuffing them into camps at eight military bases across the country.</p> <p>The inspector general confirmed reporting by The Washington Times and others that Afghans were free to leave, disappearing into the U.S., without completing full Homeland Security processing. According to the report, as of a month after the end of the airlift, more than 1,200 had left without finishing processing.</p> <p>The audit suggested two changes.</p> <p>First, it urged that the workaround to allow access to secret Defense Department files be extended until all vetting is done. The Pentagon agreed with that recommendation.</p> <p>Second, the inspector general said the Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence and Security should come up with firm procedures for sharing "derogatory information" on Afghan evacuees with the rest of the Defense Department and elsewhere in the federal government. The under secretary's office agreed with that proposal.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

## Suspicious, Unusual

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	<b>02/21 Journalists group dismayed by Olympics</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2022/feb/21/journalist-beijing-winter-olympics-foreign-correspondents-club">https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2022/feb/21/journalist-beijing-winter-olympics-foreign-correspondents-club</a>
GIST	<p>Reporting conditions for journalists covering the Beijing Winter Olympics fell short of international standards despite assurances from the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the Foreign Correspondents' Club (FCCC) of <a href="#">China</a> has said.</p> <p>The club said it was "dismayed" that at a time when global attention was trained on China more than ever the government and Olympic officials still failed to uphold their own rules on accredited foreign media. Instead "government interference occurred regularly during the Games", both inside and outside venues, when journalists tried to interview athletes and local residents.</p> <p>The FCCC also highlighted significant online trolling and abuse of journalists who had covered Olympic events and related stories. "In some cases these attacks were fuelled by Chinese state media accounts and Chinese diplomats," it said, describing <a href="#">an observed aspect</a> of state-backed online harassment and propaganda campaigns.</p> <p>The FCCC statement listed a number of claims of intimidation, obstruction and harassment, including some that the IOC – widely criticised for granting the Games to a government accused of crimes against humanity – had dismissed as "isolated incidents".</p> <p>"After an Olympic ski event, a foreign reporter was prevented by a Beijing Olympic official from interviewing a Hong Kong athlete in the Games' mixed zone, a space supposedly governed by international Olympic rules," the statement said. "Most visibly, a reporter with the Dutch national broadcaster NOS was hauled off camera during a live TV broadcast by plainclothes security men, despite the fact that he had been standing in a spot police directed him to only minutes earlier."</p>

During the opening ceremony, the NOS's Sjoerd den Daas was reporting live from outside the Olympic "bubble" in Beijing when he was [grabbed and dragged away by security officials](#).

"Unfortunately, this is increasingly the daily reality for journalists in China," the Dutch outlet later tweeted, adding that Den Daas "is fine and could fortunately finish his story a few minutes later".

The IOC said it was an "isolated" event that would not affect foreign media reporting at the Games, but the FCCC said foreign reporters were frequently tailed or manhandled by security or officials while trying to report from outside Games venues.

A France 24 correspondent said [they were assigned a "guide"](#) while reporting from outside the bubble, who reported back if their interviews "deviated" from the official narrative.

The FCCC said it was disappointed that China had tightened conditions for the press, "contrary to the Olympic spirit".

It added: "The FCCC urges the Chinese authorities to uphold their own stated rules on accredited foreign press in China: namely, to allow journalists to book and conduct their own interviews without threat of state interference and to report freely in public areas. Unfortunately, neither rule was enforced at a time when global attention was trained on China more than ever."

Press freedom in China has been worsening in recent years, with [increasing reports of harassment](#) – online and in person – as well as government-led difficulties. Ahead of the Beijing Winter Olympics, the FCCC had accused officials of ["continuously stymying"](#) media attempts to cover the preparations and lead up.

The Beijing organising committee [denied the accusations](#) and said it had "never recognised" the FCCC, but said it "guaranteed the freedom of reporting" by international media on the Games in accordance with "relevant Chinese policies". The promise was on the proviso journalists abided by "relevant Chinese laws, regulations and anti-epidemic policies".

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	<b>02/21 Twosday! Numbers like 2-22-22 fascinate</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.king5.com/article/syndication/the-conversation/happy-twosday-why-numbers-like-2-22-22-fascinate/507-46b2a2e0-44f5-4bb0-9675-41c6786e440f">https://www.king5.com/article/syndication/the-conversation/happy-twosday-why-numbers-like-2-22-22-fascinate/507-46b2a2e0-44f5-4bb0-9675-41c6786e440f</a> <a href="https://www.q13fox.com/news/happy-twosday-2-22-22-marks-a-palindrome-date-hundreds-of-years-in-the-making">https://www.q13fox.com/news/happy-twosday-2-22-22-marks-a-palindrome-date-hundreds-of-years-in-the-making</a>
GIST	<p><i>Story from The Conversation by Barry Markovsky, Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Sociology, University of South Carolina</i></p> <p>This Feb. 22, the world hits an unprecedented milestone. It's the date itself: 2/22/22. And this so-called "Twosday" falls on a Tuesday, no less.</p> <p>It's true the number pattern stands out, impossible to miss. But does it mean anything? Judging by the thousands of commemorative products available for purchase online, it may appear to.</p> <p>"Twosday" carries absolutely no historical significance or any cosmic message. Yet it does speak volumes about our brains and cultures.</p> <p><a href="#">I'm a social psychologist</a> who studies how <a href="#">paranormal claims and pseudoscience</a> take hold as popular beliefs. They're nearly always absurd from a scientific perspective, but they're great for illustrating how brains, people, groups and cultures work together to create shared meaning.</p> <p><b>Seeing patterns</b></p>

Twosday isn't the only date with a striking pattern. This century alone has had a couple Onesdays (1/11/11 and 11/11/11), and 11 other months with repetitions such as 01/01/01, 06/06/06 and 12/12/12. We'll hit Threesday, 3/3/33, in 11 years, and Foursday 11 years after that.

The brain has [evolved](#) a fantastic capacity to find meanings and connections. Doing so once meant the difference between survival and death. Recognizing paw prints in the soil, for example, signified dangerous predators to be avoided, or prey to be captured and consumed. Changes in daylight indicated when to plant crops and when to harvest them.

Even when survival isn't at stake, it's [rewarding](#) to detect a pattern such as a [familiar face](#) or [song](#). Finding one, the brain zaps its synapses with a little shot of dopamine, incentivizing itself to keep finding more patterns.

When a number sequence seems to jump out at us, this is an example of [apophenia](#): perceiving meaningful connections between unrelated things. The term was [first developed](#) to characterize a symptom of schizophrenia.

Another example of apophenia is [astrology](#), which visually connects stars into constellations. These are the familiar Zodiac signs such as "The Ram," Aries; or "The Archer," Sagittarius. Each sign is linked to meanings associated with its respective object. For example, people born under the sign of Aries are believed to be stubborn like rams. But those signs don't exist in the sky in any physical sense, and the system [fails scientific tests](#).

### **Reading into numbers**

The date 2/22/22, though striking, carries no inherent meaning beyond its function in our particular calendar. This is true for numbers in general: Their meanings are limited to measuring, labeling or counting things.

"Twosday" is a simple example of a popular form of arithmetical shenanigans: [numerology](#), the pseudoscientific practice of attaching supernatural significance to numbers.

Numerology can be [traced back](#) 2,500 years to the Greek mathematician Pythagoras, with alternative systems appearing elsewhere, including China and the Middle East.

Numerology may look mathematical, but it's more akin to palmistry and reading tea leaves. It has been popularized through magazines, books, movies, television programs, websites and other social media. Assessing the extent of numerology's popularity is difficult, but the belief that certain numbers are good or bad is common. For example, nearly a quarter of Americans [say 7 is lucky](#).

There are [many kinds](#) of numerology. The most popular form assigns numbers to names or other words, and then calculates their "root," also known as the "[destiny number](#)" or "[expression number](#)". It starts by assigning a number to each letter of the alphabet: A = 1, B = 2, up to I = 9, then the cycle repeats with J = 1, K = 2, etc.

For example, adding up the five numbers in my own first name – 2, 1, 9, 9, and 7 – yields 28. To find the root, add the digits in 28 to get 10, and then add up those two digits to get 1. For my middle and last names, the roots are 4 and 9. Adding the three roots returns 14; adding those digits reveals that my "destiny number" is 5, which numerology associates with being free-thinking, [adventurous, restless](#) and impatient.

### **More than coincidence?**

I was 10 years old when I first encountered numerology. A fellow coin collector showed me a clear plastic case holding two gleaming specimens: a copper Lincoln penny and a silver John F. Kennedy half dollar. On the back of the case was a printed label with numerical "facts" [linking the two presidents](#). For example:



6: day of the week – Friday – of both assassinations

7: letters in Kennedy's and Lincoln's last names

15: letters in both assassins' names

60: year elected – Lincoln 1860, Kennedy 1960

When you compile enough of these, it gets eerie. The experience was astonishing enough that I still recall it over a half-century later.

Are the Lincoln-Kennedy facts just coincidences? What gets overlooked is that they've been drawn from a pool of hundreds or thousands of numerical possibilities. Throw away the boring ones and you've framed the remaining coincidences in a way that gives them more credit than they deserve.

Another way of drawing eerie coincidences from very large pools of possibilities was exploited in "[The Bible Code](#)," a best-selling book in the 1990s. The author, Michael Drosnin, took the Old Testament and arranged it into [a grid of text](#). A computer algorithm [highlighted skip patterns in the grid](#), such as "every 4th character", or "2 across, 5 down," to produce a huge database of letter strings. These were then sifted by another algorithm that searched for words and phrases, and distances between them.

The method seemed to foretell many historical events, including [the murder of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin](#) in 1995: A particular skip pattern yielded his name near the phrase "assassin that will assassinate."

Findings such as these can seem impressive. However, [critics](#) have proved that the method works just as well using any [sufficiently lengthy text](#). Drosnin himself laid down this gauntlet by challenging critics to find Rabin's assassination foretold in the novel "Moby-Dick." [Mathematician Brendan McKay did exactly that](#), along with "prophecies" for many other deaths – Lincoln's and Kennedy's included.

Which coincidences people pay attention to is largely a social phenomenon. What [sociologist Erich Goode](#) terms "[paranormalism](#)," a nonscientific approach to extraordinary claims, is sustained and transmitted by group customs, norms and institutions. "The Bible Code" couldn't exist without religion, for example, and its popularity was fueled by mass media – such as its author's [interviews](#) on "The Oprah Winfrey Show" and elsewhere. In her book "[Scientifical Americans](#)," science writer [Sharon Hill](#) makes a compelling case that popular culture in the U.S. helps to foster safe havens for individual and collective belief in the pseudoscientific and paranormal.

As for "Twosday," I'll conclude by plumbing its "hidden meaning." Take the three roots of 02, 22 and 2022. We arrive at  $2 + 4 + 6 = 12$ , and the destiny number 3. Some numerologists [associate this number with](#) optimism and joy. Though I may reject the messenger, I'll accept that message.

---

**LOS ANGELES** - Palindrome fans rejoice. Tuesday marks the 22nd day of February, or 2/22/22 and many people across social media have already coined the special day as "twosday."

"Tomorrow is Tuesday 2-22-22 aka [#Twosday](#)!!! What's the significance? I haven't got a two!!!" wrote icon Pee-wee Herman.

This rare calendrical event is also special because all the numbers on the date are 2 and it falls on the day of the week that actually sounds like the number.

The last time an event like this occurred was in 1622 and the next time this will happen will be in 2422.

**US palindrome dates in February**



Not only is Tuesday a special day but the entire week through the end of this month is filled with palindrome dates.

- 2-20-22
- 2-21-22
- 2-22-22
- 2-23-22
- 2-24-22
- 2-25-22
- 2-26-22
- 2-27-22
- 2-28-22

In 2021, there were 22 palindrome dates.

### **World palindrome dates**

Once February passes, there will be no more palindrome dates in the U.S. but in other parts of the world where dates are written as date-month-year or year-month-day, there will be several palindrome dates coming their way, according to the [Farmer's Almanac](#):

- 22-1-22
- 2-2-22
- 22-2-22
- 22-3-22
- 22-4-22
- 22-5-22
- 22-6-22
- 22-7-22
- 22-8-22
- 22-9-22
- 22-11-22

### **How common are palindrome dates?**

[Aziz S. Inan](#), an electrical engineering professor at the University of Portland, calculated that in the month-day-year format, palindrome days tend to occur only in the first few centuries of each millennium (1000 years).

The last palindromic date in the second millennium (years 1001 to 2000) was Aug. 31, 1380 or 08-31-1380, according to [Timeanddate.com](#).

The first of 36 palindrome days in the current millennium (Jan. 1, 2001 to Dec. 31, 3000) was Oct. 2, 2001 (10-02-2001) and the last will be Sept. 22, 2290 (09-22-2290), the website continued.

Over a decade ago, the world got to celebrate two "Onesdays" with the dates 11.1.11 and 11.11.11.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	<b>02/21 Snowpack Cascades, Olympics in trouble</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.king5.com/article/tech/science/environment/washingtons-mountain-snowpack-threatened/281-d470f42b-359a-46f2-aabe-802d2a45a491">https://www.king5.com/article/tech/science/environment/washingtons-mountain-snowpack-threatened/281-d470f42b-359a-46f2-aabe-802d2a45a491</a>
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Snowpack in the Cascade and Olympic mountains plays an important role in Washington.</p> <p>The additional water that snowpack provides after it melts is put to good use, allowing us to do everything from take showers to irrigate crops. It provides stream flows and cools water temperatures to allow salmon and other fish to survive.</p> <p>A good snowpack can also help moderate wildfire season.</p>

	<p>But the snowpack is in trouble.</p> <p>"It's warm snow," said climate scientist Guillaume Mauger of the Cascade and Olympic mountain snowpack in Washington. Mauger works with the <a href="#">University of Washington's Climate Impacts Group</a>. "It's going to be easy to melt. We've already seen a lot of snow decline."</p> <p>At times it can be hard to envision little to no snow in the Cascades or Olympics, though we are seeing extremes.</p> <p>The Mt. Baker Ski area set a global record for recorded snowfall in the winter of 1998-1999. A decade and a half later, the region saw record-low snowpack by the spring of 2015. The winter of 2015 was followed by a record wildfire season the following summer.</p> <p>The spring of 2021 saw a banner snow year, at or near 150% of normal, only to melt off early as the <a href="#">state hit record-high temperatures</a>, including 108 degrees recorded at Sea-Tac airport in June. A few years ago, temperatures over 100 were unheard of in western Washington.</p> <p>By the 2040s, projections from the Climate Impacts Group show snow dominance shrinking dramatically and being limited to just the northern Cascades. By the 2080s, it's completely gone.</p> <p>"It becomes a dry climate in the summer, even on the west side of the state," Mauger said. "So, in the winter when you have less snowpack, you get a higher snow line. It means you're getting rain over a much bigger area."</p> <p>Mauger said we're seeing those changes now, and they're accelerating.</p> <p>It's not that there won't be snow, according to Mauger and other researchers. It's that it will be higher in the mountains where there is less real estate to store it. The winter snow season will also be shorter.</p> <p>"Spring is coming earlier in the year if you're in Oregon, California, Washington, and down south," <a href="#">Scripps Institution of Oceanography</a> scientists Amato Evan and Ian Eisenman wrote in a study published in 2021. They call it a "shrinking" winter.</p> <p>"Declining trends are observed across all months, states and climates, but are the largest in spring, in the Pacific states and locations with mild winter climate," a 2018 article in <a href="#">npj/Climate and Atmospheric Science</a> states.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>02/20 EV batteries burning aboard drifting ship</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/burning-electric-vehicle-batteries-complicate-efforts-to-fight-fire-on-drifting-ship-in-atlantic-ocean-11645385571?mod=hp_lead_pos13">https://www.wsj.com/articles/burning-electric-vehicle-batteries-complicate-efforts-to-fight-fire-on-drifting-ship-in-atlantic-ocean-11645385571?mod=hp_lead_pos13</a>
GIST	<p>The large number of electric vehicles on board <a href="#">a ship that is drifting ablaze</a> in the Atlantic Ocean is complicating efforts to extinguish the fire, the Dutch experts contracted to salvage the vessel said Sunday.</p> <p>It is unclear whether the blaze was caused by the electric cars, whose lithium-ion batteries have been known to catch fire, but the presence of burning batteries on board means SMIT Salvage, the company contracted to rescue the ship, is facing fire that spreads fast and cannot be fought with water alone, the company's owners said.</p> <p>"The cars are electric and part of the fire is the batteries that are still burning," said a spokesman for Royal Boskalis Westminster NV, which owns SMIT Salvage and the company that freed <a href="#">the ship Ever Given after it became stranded in the Suez Canal</a> last year.</p> <p>The spokesman added that it was too early to say how SMIT would put out the battery fires.</p>

The 60,000-ton [Felicity Ace merchant ship was carrying around 4,000 cars](#) from Germany to the U.S., including 1,100 Porsche sports cars and 189 super-luxury Bentleys, which are all units of Volkswagen AG, when it caught fire last Wednesday, leading to the evacuation of the 22 crew members. It has been drifting just off the Azores islands since.

The fire is the latest in [a string of supply-chain setbacks to befall an auto industry](#) that has faced production bottlenecks due to a shortage of components and [Covid-19-related disruptions](#) to international-trade routes.

Although it will be months before the cause of the fire is known, the blaze on the Felicity Ace, one of the first major fires during a transport of electric vehicles, also raises questions about how to safely transport such vehicles in the future.

For days, spokesmen for the car makers have declined to provide details to the public about the models on board the ship, but Portuguese navy officials monitoring the vessel and salvage workers fighting the blaze say based on cargo lists they have it is clear that many of the cars on board are electric vehicles.

VW and its brands export electric models such as Porsche's Taycan, Audi's e-tron, and VW's ID.4 from Germany for sale in the U.S.

"The fire continues to be active, although it has diminished in intensity," said João Manuel Mendes Cabeças, captain of the nearest port on the island of Faial in the Azores. "The expectation is that everything or almost everything burned."

Over the weekend, SMIT Salvage piloted its Phor B tug boat to douse the sides of the boat with water as smoke continued to billow out of the decks high above. Footage of the scene showed the hull was bruised and scarred from the heat inside.

The Portuguese navy isn't directly involved in efforts to quell the fire but is monitoring the ship at sea for signs of instability and leakage.

Capt. Cabeças, who is coordinating the navy's operation, told The Wall Street Journal that he spoke to the ship's captain when he arrived on shore after the crew was rescued by the Portuguese air force.

According to the ship captain's initial statements to Capt. Cabeças, alarms alerted the crew Wednesday morning to a fire on Deck 1, just above the main deck. Crew members rushed to Deck 1 but smoke prevented them from entering the cargo hold, Capt. Cabeças said. This prompted the captain to abandon the ship.

The ship's captain couldn't be reached for comment.

Among several commercial ships that came to assist the Felicity Ace was the Resilient Warrior, a Liberia-flagged 81,817-ton oil tanker, that was en route from Ingleside, Texas, to Rotterdam, Netherlands, according to a vessel-tracking site. The tanker took crew members on board to await rescue by the Portuguese air force.

The air force posted a video of the rescue operation on YouTube, showing its EH-101 Merlin helicopter lifting the Felicity Ace crew members off the deck into the aircraft. They were removed from the Resilient Warrior in two groups of 11 and taken to the island of Faial.

The Boskalis spokesman said that the Alp Guard, the first of two oceangoing tug boats en route to the area was in Portuguese water and a second called Bear, was departing from Rotterdam. Later in the week, a SMIT helicopter was due from France that the spokesman said would enable the firefighters to board the ship once conditions were stable.

"We're hoping to go on board in the course of the week," he said. "Once we're on board we can start locating and extinguishing the hot spots."

	When the fire is extinguished, the Alp Guard and the Bear will tow the Felicity Ace to a safe harbor, the spokesman said.
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>02/20 Olympics close: China's political script</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/sports/olympics/2022/02/20/olympics-china-closing-ceremonies-political-divides/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/sports/olympics/2022/02/20/olympics-china-closing-ceremonies-political-divides/</a>
GIST	<p>A week ahead of the <a href="#">Opening Ceremonies</a> of the Beijing 2008 Summer <a href="#">Olympics</a>, Chinese President Hu Jintao sat down with 25 foreign correspondents in the Great Hall of the People. In the rare, if uneventful, <a href="#">exchange</a>, he pledged “peaceful development” and political reform, furthering a sense that China was searching for common ground with the Western world.</p> <p>Fourteen years later, the prelude to Beijing’s <a href="#">second run as Olympics host</a> included no such gesture. Hours before the Opening Ceremonies, Chinese President <a href="#">Jinping</a> set the tone with his first in-person meeting with another head of state in nearly two years: a meal <a href="#">with Russian President Vladimir Putin</a> during which Xi stated, in case there was any doubt, that the two stood “shoulder to shoulder” on international affairs.</p> <p>The Winter Olympics have since proceeded according to Beijing’s carefully enforced script, demonstrating China’s prowess in sports, technology and social control, while projecting an uncompromising attitude toward its many diplomatic disagreements with democratic nations.</p> <p>Events ended Sunday evening much as they began — with a futuristic performance in front of bundled-up spectators filling about half of the National Stadium, also known as the Bird’s Nest. With Xi watching through binoculars, athletes filed in beneath a three-dimensional image of a red Chinese knot, a good-luck charm symbolizing unity and longevity. In a speech, Beijing’s Communist Party chief, Cai Qi, said he was proud of epidemic prevention workers and volunteers for keeping events safe and warm.</p> <p>“This unforgettable experience was only possible because of our gracious hosts: the Chinese people,” International Olympic Committee (IOC) President Thomas Bach said to conclude proceedings.</p> <p>The Chinese Communist Party may be happy with the results. But anyone hoping the mass sporting event could nudge China toward being more open and less repressive has little cause for celebration.</p> <p>There was no major covid outbreak in China thanks to a “<a href="#">closed loop</a>” of venues; after a <a href="#">warning</a> from Chinese officials, there were no political protests targeting Beijing; and with an expanded team of <a href="#">naturalized athletes</a>, a country that has been traditionally weak in winter sports exceeded expectations, including nine gold medals.</p> <p>“From China’s perspective, they will be happy with covid control, happy with the medal count and generally not too bothered about anything else,” said Mark Dreyer, author of “Sporting Superpower: An Insider’s View on China’s Quest to be the Best.”</p> <p>Chinese officials have rejected questions about their <a href="#">promotion of political messages and symbols</a> during events. At a regular news conference on Thursday, Yan Jiarong, spokesperson for the Beijing organizing committee, repeatedly delivered politically charged and prepared remarks in response to questions not addressed to her.</p> <p>Yan, a former Chinese diplomat at the United Nations, interjected to state Beijing’s claim that Taiwan, a self-governing island of 23.5 million people, “is an indivisible part of China.” She later called reports of forced labor in Xinjiang “lies.” Each time, she added that China has consistently opposed the politicization of sports and the Winter Olympics without a hint of irony.</p>

“It was just one moment, but there was a sense that she was in charge and was making that clear,” Dreyer said. “She seemed to be saying, ‘These are our Games, these are our red lines, and we won’t stand any nonsense.’ ”

Such behavior fits with the [combative diplomacy](#) that has become common under Xi. Far more than Hu’s personal association with the 2008 Summer Olympics, [these are Xi’s Games](#). Chinese state media has described him as being directly involved throughout planning and implementation.

Relentlessly positive coverage of the Olympics in Chinese media has attempted to drown out news that might undermine Beijing’s moment. Little attention has been devoted to swirling questions about the eligibility of Russian Olympic Committee figure skater Kamila Valieva, who [tested positive for a banned substance](#), or to [mounting concern](#) about the possibility of a Kremlin-ordered invasion of Ukraine.

News conferences with the IOC and Beijing organizers have featured a [surreal divide](#) between international journalists asking for the latest on the doping scandal or other flash points while their local counterparts unerringly steered the topic back to how well everything is going.

In the place of contentious issues, Chinese media has sought to boost “positive energy” by focusing on good reviews of the Olympic Village from foreign athletes, or the popularity of Olympic mascot Bing Dwen Dwen, a pudgy space panda whose iterations have [been in short supply](#).

“The opinion within China and outside is so different,” said Yaqiu Wang, China researcher at Human Rights Watch. “In the past two years the information environment has changed as censorship has gotten worse, and because of the pandemic, people haven’t been outside the country.”

Within China, the biggest threat to state media’s upbeat tone has been public outrage about the plight of a woman who was [found chained by the neck](#) in a shed after likely being sold as a bride. But inside the information bubble of the Olympics themselves, Beijing has staunchly defended its narrative. As Chinese officials used every opportunity to remind journalists and athletes that the Olympics should not be politicized, the Games in Beijing were infused with politically tinged elements.

A soldier involved in a deadly border skirmish with India was chosen as a torchbearer, while [Dinigeer Yilimujiang](#), a Uyghur cross-country skier, was selected to light the Olympic cauldron, in a move widely interpreted as a way to counter criticism of mass reeducation programs in Xinjiang, the Uyghur homeland.

Yilimujiang was absent from the mixed zone through which athletes are normally required to pass after competitions during her early events. In an interview with state-run Global Times, she later claimed journalists had simply not known what she looked like but was then dropped from China’s lineup for the relay event.

A global outpouring of concern about the well-being of tennis star Peng Shuai, who briefly disappeared from public life after disclosing a fraught sexual relationship with a former senior government official in November, was deflected with a tightly controlled appearance when she reemerged. Peng, 36, entered the Olympic bubble, ate a meal with Bach and sat down with a French sporting publication.

During that interview, which was arranged and presided over by the Chinese Olympic Committee, she [announced her retirement](#) from professional tennis and denied that her emotional account of being pressured into a sexual relationship with retired powerful vice premier Zhang Gaoli was an allegation of assault.

The polarized environment has meant that [Chinese American](#) athletes, instead of bridging Chinese and Western cultures, often found themselves plunged into geopolitical divides.

While [Eileen Gu](#), the California-born freestyle skier who represents China, has been welcomed as a symbol of national strength after she won two gold medals and a silver, her meteoric rise has also [created unease](#) among some conservative Chinese commentators who worry she may not always be loyal to China.

<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	<p>Another U.S.-born and raised athlete, figure skater Zhu Yi, was targeted with <a href="#">online abuse</a> after she fell twice.</p> <p>Regional disputes, too, were not spared. A rift between South Korea and China was deepened when both countries' fans <a href="#">exchanged insults</a> over judging calls and allegations of cultural appropriation.</p> <p>In the run-up to the Olympics, Chinese scholars spoke of the events as an opportunity to return to the days of “ping-pong diplomacy” when American athletes competing in China and vice versa led the thaw that resulted in President Nixon’s visit in early 1972.</p> <p>The historic analogy, spurred by next week being the 50th anniversary of Nixon’s visit, hints at how far mutual trust has plummeted: Even those in China urging a detente understood that President Biden’s mere attendance would be a grand political gesture like the gamble Nixon took to draw China away from the Soviet Union during the Cold War.</p> <p>But after diplomatic boycotts from the United States, Britain, Australia and Canada, the wishful suggestion that the Games could ease a standoff with the Western liberal democracies faded.</p> <p>“The most important reasons we hosted the Olympics are to strengthen national cohesion and self-confidence, as well as to promote interactions between China and the rest of the world to defeat Western attempts to isolate China,” state-run Xinhua News Agency <a href="#">said in a recent editorial</a>.</p>
-------------------------------	---

<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>02/19 Rodent infestation Family Dollar warehouse</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/19/us/fda-family-dollar-recall.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/19/us/fda-family-dollar-recall.html</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>The value-store chain Family Dollar said on Saturday that it had temporarily closed more than 400 stores after the discovery of a rodent infestation and other unsanitary conditions at a distribution center in Arkansas touched off a far-reaching recall of food, dietary supplements, cosmetics and other products.</p> <p>A recent Food and Drug Administration inspection of the facility, in West Memphis, Ark., found live and dead rodents “in various states of decay,” rodent droppings, evidence of gnawing and nesting, and products stored in conditions that did not protect against these unsanitary conditions, the agency <a href="#">said in a statement</a> on Friday.</p> <p>A fumigation of the facility last month revealed more than 1,100 dead rodents, and a review of company records indicated the collection of more than 2,300 rodents from late March to September, “demonstrating a history of infestation,” the agency said. Rodent contamination can cause salmonella and infectious diseases, the F.D.A. said.</p> <p>Families rely on stores like Family Dollar for food, medicine and other products, and those items should be safe, Judith McMeekin, an associate commissioner in the agency’s Office of Regulatory Affairs, said in the statement.</p> <p>“No one should be subjected to products stored in the kind of unacceptable conditions that we found in this Family Dollar distribution facility,” she said. “These conditions appear to be violations of federal law that could put families’ health at risk.”</p> <p>Family Dollar <a href="#">said in a statement</a> that the voluntary recall, which also covers drugs, medical devices and pet food, includes F.D.A.-regulated products that were stored and shipped from the distribution center to 404 stores in Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Missouri, Mississippi and Tennessee.</p> <p>Kayleigh Campbell, a Dollar Tree spokeswoman, said in an email on Saturday that the company had “temporarily closed the affected stores in order to proficiently conduct the voluntary recall,” and that the stores would reopen as soon as possible.</p>



“We take situations like this very seriously and are committed to providing safe and quality products to our customers,” Ms. Campbell said. “We have been fully cooperating with all regulatory agencies in the resolution of this matter and are in the process of remediating the issue.”

The recall covers products that were stored at the distribution center from the beginning of 2021 to the present. It does not apply to items shipped directly to the stores from distributors or manufacturers. Family Dollar said it was not aware of reports of illness related to the recall.

“Family Dollar is notifying its affected stores by letter asking them to check their stock immediately and to quarantine and discontinue the sale of any affected product,” the company said in its statement. “Customers that may have bought affected product may return such product to the Family Dollar store where they were purchased without receipt.”

The F.D.A. investigation began in January after a consumer complaint and was completed on Feb. 11, the agency said. In its statement, the F.D.A. said that all drugs, medical devices, cosmetics and dietary supplements should be discarded regardless of packaging. Food in undamaged glass or metal cans could still be used if cleaned and sanitized.

Family Dollar is a brand under its parent company, Dollar Tree, a rapidly growing retail behemoth that operates more than 16,000 stores across the United States and Canada.

Like other retailers, Dollar Tree has struggled with freight and supply-chain costs during the pandemic.

Dollar Tree [announced in November](#) a plan to raise the prices of most items in all its stores to \$1.25 from \$1 after a successful test of the new pricing strategy. Company officials called the decision “permanent” and not a response to current market conditions.

The company said that the price increase, which [it first announced it would test in September](#), would help mitigate freight and distribution costs and wage increases, and would allow it to bring back some products that it was no longer able to offer at \$1.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	02/19 Plant fossils found in San Juan Islands
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/science/plant-fossils-found-in-san-juan-islands-like-finding-a-penguin-in-north-america/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/science/plant-fossils-found-in-san-juan-islands-like-finding-a-penguin-in-north-america/</a>
GIST	<p>Fossilized plants discovered in the San Juan Islands have some paleobotanists scratching their heads. The mystery centers on two fossilized winged fruits discovered by fossil hunters on Sucia Island. The island is one of the northernmost San Juan Islands and is accessible only by watercraft.</p> <p>Now, scientists are wondering how the fossils ended up there.</p> <p>Both fossils are from a genus previously believed to be limited to the Southern Hemisphere during the Cretaceous period. New research <a href="#">published in January</a> in the journal New Phytologist is prompting scientists to rethink how plants may have been dispersed over 66 million years ago.</p> <p>“In some ways this is like finding a penguin in North America,” <a href="#">said Brian Atkinson</a>, a co-author of the research report and an assistant professor at the University of Kansas.</p> <p>Ceratopetalum, the fossils’ assigned genus, still has living members in the form of shrubs or trees today in eastern Australia and Papua New Guinea, said Keana Tang, a doctoral student at the University of Kansas and the study’s lead author. While the fruits typically may be dispersed by wind, it is not clear how the fossil made its way to North America, she said.</p> <p>The findings suggest the fossilized plants’ family may have been more common than previously thought.</p>



	<p>“Or was this just kind of a lucky chance, where it somehow transported northwards through an exchange from the Antarctic to South America to North America?” Tang said.</p> <p>The fossils were collected by citizen scientists David Starr and Jim Goedert, who had been granted a scientific research permit. The fossils were then scanned at the University of Michigan, Atkinson said. At the University of Kansas, Tang further analyzed the fossils using a painstaking process known as the “cellulose acetate peeling” technique.</p> <p>During the process, the rock face is polished, dipped into a mild hydrochloric acid solution, and then rinsed with water and acetone to produce a very thin sheet. The process lets scientists see a very thin section of the rock that is just a few micrometers thick.</p> <p>The technique let Tang analyze the entire fossils, layer by layer, and see different structures in the rock matrix, she said.</p> <p>Sucia Island Marine State Park is managed by the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission. Fossils and other paleontological resources cannot be collected without a scientific research permit.</p>
	<a href="#">Return to Top</a>

HEADLINE	<b>02/18 King Co. fares well for zombie apocalypse</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/3-wa-cities-among-nations-best-for-surviving-a-zombie-apocalypse/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/3-wa-cities-among-nations-best-for-surviving-a-zombie-apocalypse/</a>
GIST	<p>In a time of a pandemic, threats of climate change and other looming crises, it may be comforting to know that King County appears to be one of the best places to weather a certain kind of disaster — a zombie apocalypse.</p> <p>Inspired by the <a href="#">CDC's Zombie Preparedness 101</a> guide — a lighthearted way to educate people on how to prepare for emergencies and disasters — a national lawn-care company dug through data to come up with their own ranking of the best <a href="#">cities in the U.S. for surviving a zombie apocalypse</a>.</p> <p>The analysis by LawnLove is based on a <a href="#">comparison of the 200 largest cities</a> in the U.S. across 23 metrics, including the <a href="#">percentage of the population in good health</a>, the number of military bases and hospitals in the region, the proximity of marinas and ports, and the accessibility to outdoor gear and weapons.</p> <p>The analysis shows the Pacific Northwest would likely fare well, with Bellevue, Vancouver and Seattle placing among the top 10 cities. Portland also fared pretty well, coming in at 11th place.</p> <p>It could be because residents of the Seattle and Portland metropolitan areas tend to be young, healthy and aficionados of exercise, getting <a href="#">significantly more than the national average</a>. In fact, Seattle placed third behind Arlington, Virginia, and Minneapolis, Minnesota, and Portland placed ninth in last year's fitness index by the American College of Sports Medicine.</p> <p>The author of the survey also noted that having two well-prepared cities next to each other creates a stronger metro area. The top of the rankings was dominated by cities within a few miles of one another:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bellevue (No. 2) and Seattle (No. 6)</li> <li>• Minneapolis (No. 4) and St. Paul (No. 7)</li> <li>• Vancouver, Washington, (No. 5) and Portland (No. 11)</li> <li>• Fort Lauderdale (No. 9) and Hollywood, Florida (No. 10)</li> </ul> <p>Maybe you agree with comedian and Seattle native Derek Sheen that a zombie apocalypse wouldn't pose much of a threat in the Seattle area. “We're all retail zombies anyway, working at tech jobs, warehouses and the consumer sector. We're already dead inside,” Sheen said.</p> <p>Or maybe you think that a zombie apocalypse spells doom for all, including people in the well-prepared Northwest.</p>

Either way, a zombie apocalypse remains an unlikely threat. Thinking about it does, however, raise important questions of emergency preparedness. [The city of Seattle says our region ranks No. 1](#) in the country when it comes to the number of hazards we face. The city has identified 18 hazards that carry the greatest risk to the city, including earthquakes and windstorms.

And regardless of the disaster, [preparation is the key to resilience](#), both for individuals and for communities, according to King County Emergency Management.

“Communities that are the most resilient in disasters are communities where neighbors know each other and people help one another in the recovery,” said Kate Cole, a spokesperson for Public Health — Seattle & King County.

“People helping people is more fundamental than even government assistance, especially when resources are spread thin by a catastrophe,” she said.

Cole said the county’s experience during the recent pandemic underscored the need to bolster and harness the work already being done by existing community groups.

The creation of the [Pandemic and Racism Community Advisory Group](#), which is made up of representatives from community groups, businesses and other government branches, is one way the county has sought to build networks and strengthen ties between people and policies, she said.

One way to prepare for a zombie apocalypse — or any emergency you might find yourself in — is to assemble an emergency kit.

Here is a checklist from the CDC, which recommends the following, at minimum:

- Water: one gallon per person, per day
- Food: nonperishable, easy-to-prepare items (minimum 3-day supply)
- Flashlights
- Battery-powered or hand-crank radio (NOAA Weather Radio, if possible)
- Extra batteries
- First-aid kit (whistle, antibiotic ointment, bandages, face masks, gloves and reference book)
- Medications (7 day supply and medicinal dispensers if necessary)
- Multipurpose supplies (wrench, pliers, plastic sheet, duct tape, scissors, matches)
- Sanitation/personal hygiene items and bleach
- Copies of personal documents (medication list and pertinent medical information, proof of address, deed/lease to home, passports, birth certificates, insurance policies)
- Cellphone with charger
- Family disaster plan (family and emergency contact information)
- Extra cash
- Emergency blanket, extra clothes, sleeping bag (1 for each person)
- Map(s) of the area

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	<b>02/19 China saga of a chained woman unfolds</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://apnews.com/article/winter-olympics-chained-woman-eileen-gu-fa30a04d74a91f5beff9983442353971">https://apnews.com/article/winter-olympics-chained-woman-eileen-gu-fa30a04d74a91f5beff9983442353971</a>
GIST	<p>TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — The post, on China’s Weibo social platform, resembled many others posted by official media during these Olympics — an ode to freestyle skier Eileen Gu, known to Chinese as Gu Ailing. “The biggest gold medal in Eileen Gu’s heart,” it teased.</p> <p>Underneath, in the comments from users, came the questions. They were not on topic. They were about something else entirely — a chained woman captured in a viral video 500 miles from Beijing, on the southeastern China coast.</p>

“Can you pay attention to Feng county? Where’s the responsibility of national media?” one user asked. Said another: “Please thoroughly investigate the chained mother in Xuzhou so that every Chinese girl can accept the freedom and power given to them by this great era, just like our Ailing.”

Since Jan. 28, the story of the chained woman who appeared in the video has continued to grow, evading numerous censors both digital and human. Underneath much Olympics coverage — from stories about copyright violations of mascot Bing Dwen Dwen to Gu’s every move — Chinese commenters exhorted national media to highlight the growing scandal.

Even as the original accounts that shared the video disappeared and censors on social media platforms deleted articles and hashtags, amateur sleuths kept the story alive online. Offline, former investigative journalists went reporting on the scene.

“For this incident to have gotten this much attention, it’s only because of netizens calling attention to it that it hasn’t sunk,” said Chase Zhao, an English teacher who has been following the case closely.

It is one case, one woman in a population of 1.4 billion at a moment when the Olympics are commanding a chunk of the national bandwidth. But as it unfolds, it affords a glimpse into what’s happening in China behind the Winter Games — and how people advocate for causes even in the widely censored, politically fraught space of Chinese social media.

—

Days before the Lunar New Year holiday began on Feb. 1, a video spread online from a village in Feng county, located in Jiangsu province on the coast. It showed a woman with a chain around her neck.

The chain wasn’t the subject of the video. A blogger had visited the village to show her as an example of a member of a poor rural family that would benefit from donations.

In the video, he offers her a jacket, asking if she’s cold. Her response is unclear. The weather outside is zero degrees Celsius (32 Fahrenheit), according to the video, and she is wearing a dirty pink sweatshirt. He puts a child’s jacket on her. He does not address the chain. Another video by the same blogger shows an interview with the woman’s husband, who proudly says he has eight children with his wife.

The implications were troubling. Was the woman a victim of human trafficking? Was she abused? Why could she not move freely? What was her story?

The forthcoming answers did not really address such questions.

— On Jan. 28, the county government’s propaganda office said the woman had not been trafficked and was married. She was chained, it said, because of mental health issues. In another statement shortly after, they said she’d been homeless.

— Later, the statement changed. The county government said the woman’s name was “Xiaohuamei,” or Little Plum Blossom, and that she had been brought to Jiangsu for medical treatment from a remote part of Yunnan province near Myanmar. She had been traveling with a woman named Sang from her village who somehow lost her.

— On Feb. 10, the city government issued a statement saying it had arrested three people, including Sang, Sang’s husband and the father of the eight children — the first two for human trafficking, the father for illegal detention.

So many discrepancies. But what was the truth? On social media, people weren’t having it. One popular Weibo user, “Jiangning popo,” a police officer in Nanjing, said to his 5 million followers: “I’m so angry I could explode.”

---

The changing narratives provoked people online into action.

Some created complex charts laying out the differences between each government notice. And as the contradictory answers grew, others took the situation into their own hands.

Two women, known only by their online aliases Quanquan and Wuyi, traveled to Feng county to help Little Plum Blossom. Based on their video and audio posts, they drove around, writing slogans on their car with lipstick to publicize the case while talking to people about the issue. At one point, according to a video posted by Quanquan, police had the slogans scrubbed from their car.

The two never met Plum Blossom, and were barred from entering a hospital where she had been taken when they tried to bring her a bouquet of sunflowers. Later, the bouquet they left behind appeared in a short video segment from state broadcaster CCTV.

When the two stopped posting, others online stepped in asking people to call the police station to find out what happened, fearing they were detained.

Zhao, the English teacher, said she tried calling the police station in Feng County to ask about the two women. A women's rights activist in Beijing who declined to be named confirmed Friday that they had been detained and were released.

Meanwhile, two former investigative journalists, known by their pen names Ma Sa and Tie Mu, set out to the village in Yunnan that Feng county officials had said the woman came from. According to an article they published on WeChat, they interviewed village residents who confirmed that someone once called Little Plum Blossom did live there and had been married before. They also reportedly found her sister. But they couldn't confirm if she was the chained woman.

By this point, many people were chiming in. One Weibo user employed professional editing software to compare faces, grabbing 900,000 views. A WeChat user looked up court records of women in Fengxian county who had been trafficked. Another former journalist posted a marriage license, purportedly from Little Plum Blossom, that someone sent to him — and raised an age discrepancy.

The inconsistencies highlighted a crucial point: No one had the whole story.

“If you place your hope on other people or other organizations, that's not reliable,” said Yang Jingyao, a 28-year old lawyer in Beijing who said he had been following the case closely. “You have to have your own judgement on an issue.”

---

If facts were in short supply, emotion was not. And understandably so.

“It evokes a broad sense of frustration and anger and a sense of powerlessness among people when they see government abuses and negligence,” said Yaqiu Wang, a senior researcher at Human Rights Watch. She looks at her WeChat feed lately, she says, and “nobody is talking about the Olympics, but everyone is talking about this woman.”

Little Plum Blossom has not been able to advocate for herself. In the original video that circulated, her speech is impossible to understand. Since then, the only video has come from CCTV, the state broadcaster, with her face obscured to protect her identity. As with tennis player Peng Shuai, who had accused a senior politician of rape, she has not been able to meet with others independently.

Official statistics estimate that as of 2011, more than 16 million people in China had serious mental illnesses. But psychiatric hospitals have only one bed for every 100,000 patients, a rate far below that of

other upper middle-income countries. And other care options are scarce, said Zhiying Ma, a professor at the University of Chicago who studies mental health in China.

Little Plum Blossom has been taken to a hospital for now, according to CCTV. And on Thursday, the Jiangsu provincial government said it planned to send a team to investigate. Many online expressed relief. Others, though, were less impressed: Too little, too late, they said.

So the story's cycle continues — a cycle that churns together fact, rumor, outrage, and the good intentions of ordinary Chinese internet users. Eventually, it will produce results from an official final investigation, monitored closely by a skittish government that shuts down conversations that might reflect poorly on it. The result: an official version of truth.

And while the Beijing Olympics wind to an end, watched by the world in a way this case is not, provincial investigators begin to dig in. As they do, says Ma, the professor, the most vital question remains unanswered:

“What's the solution? What's the future for that woman?”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	<b>02/18 Reckoning: the great greenwashing scam</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/feb/18/greenwashing-pr-advertising-oil-firms-exxon-chevron-shell-bp">https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/feb/18/greenwashing-pr-advertising-oil-firms-exxon-chevron-shell-bp</a>
GIST	<p>This week a <a href="#">peer-reviewed study confirmed</a> what many have suspected for years: major oil companies are not fully backing up their clean energy talk with action. Now the PR and advertising firms that have been creating the industry's greenwashing strategies for decades face a reckoning over whether they will continue serving big oil.</p> <p>The study compared the rhetoric and actions on climate and clean energy from 2009 to 2020 from the world's four largest oil companies – ExxonMobil, Chevron, Shell and BP. Writing in the journal Plos One, researchers from Tohoku University and Kyoto University in Japan conclude that the companies are not, in fact, transitioning their business models to clean energy.</p> <p>“The magnitude of investments and actions does not match discourse,” they write. “Until actions and investment behavior are brought into alignment with discourse, accusations of greenwashing appear well-founded.”</p> <p>Although this isn't the first time that oil companies have been accused of overstating their climate bona fides, it has never been set out quite so comprehensively, according to environmental sociologist Dr Robert Brulle at Brown University. “This is the first robust, empirical, peer-reviewed analysis of the activities – of the speech, business plans, and the actual investment patterns – of the major oil companies regarding their support or opposition to the transition to a sustainable society,” he says.</p> <p>Brulle says PR firms and advertising agencies that have created campaigns around the oil firms' net-zero claims are now on notice. “There's no plausible deniability that they are unaware of the activities of these companies after this paper has been published,” he says. “This paper clearly shows that these companies aren't walking the talk.”</p> <p>That forces the hand of PR firms such as Edelman – which <a href="#">made headlines</a> late last year for making big climate pledges while also working for oil majors like Exxon and Shell – and trade groups such as the American Fuel and Petrochemical Manufacturers, which have a reputation for blocking climate policy. At a company meeting in December, the firm's chief executive, Richard Edelman, told employees that the company would not walk away from fossil-fuel clients, but that it would “reject projects that delay progress toward a future with net-zero greenhouse gas emissions”. In the face of this week's report, it would be hard to say that any oil major meets that standard.</p>

Casey Norton, a spokesperson for Exxon, said: “ExxonMobil has long acknowledged that climate change is real and poses serious risks. In addition to our substantial investments in next generation technologies, ExxonMobil also advocates for responsible climate-related policies.”

“These claims of investments in clean energy are yet another case of words not matching actions,” Gregory Trencher, one of the study’s authors, says. Trencher notes that Exxon invested only 0.23% of its total capital expenditure in low-carbon energy production and development from 2010 to 2018, and that the company stated in an April 2021 energy and carbon summary report that it does not invest in renewables. As for acknowledging climate science, Trencher says that makes up “only a small part of our study – specifically, it is but one of 25 indicators studied”.

Edelman did not reply to a request for comment by press time. Neither did the PR firm WPP, which has done extensive work for [BP](#) and [Chevron](#). The New York Times’ T Brand Studio, which has created campaigns for both [Exxon](#) and [Shell](#) amplifying their net-zero claims, also declined to comment on how this study might play into that work. The Washington Post also declined to respond to questions about whether its WP Creative Group would continue to create campaigns for [Chevron](#), [Shell](#) or the [American Petroleum Institute](#), in light of such extensive documentation that previous campaigns were misleading.

According to Brulle, it’s unlikely that PR and advertising firms will be able to serve the fossil-fuel industry as they have in the past. “It doesn’t seem to me that they have the room to do that any more,” he said. “They would have to basically engage in bad-faith advertising and greenwashing to continue to support these organizations as actually engaging in climate action.”

The greenwashing study comes just a week after House Democrats Katie Porter and Raúl Grijalva [sent letters](#) to six PR firms asking for more details on their work for fossil fuel companies, particularly with respect to campaigns that misled the public on climate change. The House oversight committee has indicated that it will also question PR firms as part of its investigation into climate disinformation.

Meanwhile, ExxonMobil is due back in court in Massachusetts early next month to fight charges that it defrauded residents of that state on climate. Similar fraud charges have been leveled at all of the oil majors via an ever-growing list of cases, including those filed in Minnesota, the District of Columbia, Delaware and Vermont.

But Christine Arena, a former Edelman vice-president who now runs her own social impact production company Generous Films, says climate fraud can’t happen without the help of the PR and advertising industry.

“PR and ad firms are central players in what we look at as the influence industry,” she says. “There’s a lot of money spent, and emphasis on external facing advertising, marketing, and promotion that helps prop up the fossil fuel industry’s social license to operate and give the world a sense that, to quote API, ‘We’re on it.’ We don’t need regulation. We’re good corporate actors.”

Brulle says the media should also take note of this study, especially when an oil company chief executive makes a claim around their company’s climate commitments. “Good, critical reporting would have to challenge the statements of these fossil fuel companies,” he says.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	02/18 Hostess unveils caffeinated doughnuts
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2022/02/18/hostess-caffeinated-doughnuts/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2022/02/18/hostess-caffeinated-doughnuts/</a>
GIST	Since seemingly the dawn of time, humans have enjoyed coffee with doughnuts.  Now, Hostess — maker of Twinkies, Ho Hos and Ding Dongs — is combining the two by creating caffeinated doughnuts.

The bakery giant's Boost Jumbo Donettes, which the company plans to ship out this month, will come in two flavors — chocolate mocha and caramel macchiato. Each single-serving doughnut contains 50 to 70 milligrams of caffeine, a little less than [the 80 to 100 milligrams in an eight-ounce cup of coffee](#).

"For adults who are increasingly looking for alternative sources of caffeine, our new Hostess Boost Jumbo Donettes offer a tasty, energy-boosting, grab-and-go way to jumpstart the day," Christopher Balach, general manager of Hostess Brands, [said in a statement](#).

[Caffeine consumption has increased in recent decades](#), and consumers are getting it from more sources outside standbys such as coffee, tea and soda. Hostess is following other food companies looking to tap into that growing market by adding the stimulant to their food and drinks.

[Researchers in 2014 determined](#) that 85 percent of people in the United States consumed at least one caffeinated beverage a day, most typically coffee, tea or soda. Despite popping up on the market and making news, energy drinks such as Red Bull, Monster and 5-hour Energy made up a sliver of the market at the time.

But [a study in 2019 in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine](#) found that energy-drink consumption in the United States "increased substantially" and that those who drank such beverages took in far more caffeine than those who didn't. The study also hinted at a growing market among younger people.

"While the findings indicate that daily intake among adolescents and middle-aged adults may be leveling off and overall use across all groups is relatively limited, use by young adults continues to steadily rise."

Over the past decade, companies have tried to cater to that increasing demand by selling everyday foods spiked with caffeine — [potato chips](#), sunflower seeds, chocolate, maple syrup and [beef jerky](#), to name a few. Cracker Jack started selling snack mixes with caffeine under the brand Cracker Jack'd Power Bites, [The Washington Post reported](#) in 2013.

"There's a proliferation of foods; all kinds of things are now being caffeinated," Michael Jacobson of the Center for Science in the Public Interest told [NPR](#) in 2012.

Despite a seemingly timeless pairing, the marriage of coffee and doughnuts solidified after World War II. While selling a variety of food out of a fleet of 200 trucks, William Rosenberg noticed 40 percent of his sales came from only two products: pastries and coffee, [the Los Angeles Times reported](#). In 1948, that led Rosenberg to open [the Open Kettle](#) in Quincy, Mass. Later renamed as Dunkin' Donuts, the business would swell to about 1,000 shops across the country by the end of the 1970s. Today, there are more than 11,300 Dunkin' locations worldwide, including some 8,500 in the United States, according to [the company's website](#).

Since doughnut shops were often the only businesses open in the wee hours, police officers were frequent patrons, looking to grab a bite and something to keep them awake through the graveyard shift, [according to Time](#). In his autobiography, Rosenberg said he leaned into that dynamic, intentionally creating a welcoming atmosphere for officers so he would get a free police presence in return.

"Graveyard cops in the forties and fifties had few choices. They could pack lunch, pray for an all-night diner on their route or fill up on doughnuts," [Norm Stamper, former chief of the Seattle Police Department, said](#) in the book "The Donut: History, Recipes, and Lore from Boston to Berlin" by Michael Krondl. "They were cheap and convenient."

Recent market research shows that coffee is the dominant member of the pair, even in doughnuts' eponymous businesses. In doughnut shops, people bought 2.1 billion servings of coffee compared to 805 million servings of doughnuts in a year-long period spanning 2018 and 2019, according to the NPD Group, a market research firm.



“We are a nation of coffee drinkers and while we like our donuts too, we tend to be fueled by coffee and drink more of it,” David Portalatin, a food industry adviser for NPD Group, [told Fox Business in 2020](#). “The takeaway for donut shops? If you serve good tasting coffee with your good tasting donuts, consumers will visit.”

Coffee *with* doughnuts?

Hostess is hoping consumers like its all-in-one offering.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	<b>02/18 Record number millionaires: 401(k)s, IRAs</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2022/02/18/fidelity-401k-millionaires/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2022/02/18/fidelity-401k-millionaires/</a>
GIST	<p>Meet the newly minted millionaires next door.</p> <p>They didn't put all their money into a Microsoft-type stock that made them rich. They didn't take a chance on speculating in <a href="#">cryptocurrency</a> with its crazy <a href="#">volatility</a> or start a business that they then sold to some billionaire.</p> <p>No, many current millionaires are government workers, civil servants, educators, military service members (or retired military), managers or co-workers clocking in just like you, leaving at the end of a shift to run and pick up their kids from school. Many never earned six-figure salaries.</p> <p>They've been investing for nearly three decades, taking every dollar offered by their employers in matching retirement plan contributions. They also don't cash out their retirement savings when they change jobs.</p> <p>And, most importantly, they didn't let a <a href="#">pandemic</a> or the <a href="#">related economic problems</a>, or <a href="#">skittish investors</a>, scare them away from the stock market.</p> <p>In its quarterly retirement analysis, Fidelity Investments reported that its number of IRA (individual retirement account) and 401(k) millionaires hit an all-time high. Likewise, the number of millionaires investing in the Thrift Savings Plan (TSP), the federal government's version of a 401(k), also spiked significantly.</p> <p>What it tells us is that even amid economic uncertainty, people are still focused on their retirement savings goals, said Jason Jagatic, head of workplace thought leadership for Fidelity.</p> <p>Fidelity, one of the largest managers of workplace plans, reported that its number of 401(k) millionaires in the fourth quarter of 2021 jumped 32 percent to 442,000, up from 334,000 a year earlier. The number of IRA millionaires increased 30 percent, from 288,300 to 376,100, for the same time period.</p> <p>The number of millionaires investing in the Thrift Savings Plan also saw surged, by nearly 50 percent. As of Dec. 31, there were 112,880 TSP millionaires, up from 75,420 a year ago, according to the Federal Retirement Thrift Investment Board.</p> <p>For the fourth quarter, account balances also ballooned, Fidelity said.</p> <p>Its average 401(k) balance increased to a record \$130,700 in the fourth quarter, up 4 percent from the previous quarter and 8 percent from a year ago. The average IRA balance was down slightly to \$135,600 for the fourth quarter compared with the third quarter. But IRA balances were up 6 percent from the 2020 fourth quarter.</p> <p>A record 38 percent of individuals increased their 401(k) contributions in 2021, with an average increase of more than 3 percent, Fidelity said.</p>

It was wonderful to see younger Gen Z workers (individuals born between 1997 and 2012) increasing their retirement contributions — 53 percent increased their contribution rate last year. Investing early and letting compounding work for them is key.

Even as the economy was struggling to cope with covid-related downturns, employers kept offering workers matching contributions to their retirement plans. The average employer contribution last year reached \$4,080, according to Fidelity.

Still, the good news from Fidelity needs to be weighed against other data that shows a different situation for folks not benefiting from the stock market and employer-sponsored plans. They are being left behind in the accumulation of wealth that can carry them through retirement. If they don't catch up, they will be more likely to be left living entirely on Social Security, which is having its own issues with solvency.

"We know that many people are still struggling with the economic impacts of the last couple of years," Jagatic said.

Only slightly more than half (50.5 percent) of all American families have retirement accounts, according to Federal Reserve data from 2019, the most recent available. Only 34.9 percent of Black families and 25.5 percent of Hispanic families have such accounts, compared with 57.2 percent of White families.

Millions of workers without employer-provided retirement savings plans struggle to save for retirement or face the prospect of not being able to retire at all, according to a [survey](#) from Pew Charitable Trusts.

Pew surveyed 1,000 workers who said they worked at nontraditional jobs — gig workers, freelancers, sole proprietors, day laborers. The vast majority didn't participate in a workplace plan during the year leading up to the survey.

"If given the opportunity, many workers will save," Pew said.

This is true. When employers automatically enroll employees, they continue investing. The most common default savings rate for auto-enrolled employees is 3 percent, according to Fidelity. But a growing number of companies are pushing this rate up. Of the Fidelity 401(k) plans that auto-enroll employees, nearly 37 percent automatically enrolled employees at a 5 percent or higher contribution rate.

There's still an opportunity to save for retirement if you don't have a workplace plan. Workers can contribute to an IRA, with a maximum annual contribution for 2022 of \$6,000. If you're 50 or over, you can contribute an additional \$1,000 to an IRA in a catch-up contribution, for a total of \$7,000.

Yet, we know having the push from employers can make a huge difference.

"With workplace plans, I think one of the major advantages often is employers are giving matches, whereas you are not getting that match through an IRA," Jagatic said.

Although the number of 401(k) millionaires in the plans that Fidelity manages is a relatively small percentage — 2 percent out of 20.4 million accounts — the growth is still staggering. As of Dec. 31, out of 12.3 million IRA accounts, 3 percent of investors had \$1 million or more.

Many investors fear missing out on the next great thing. Other investments such as [cryptocurrency](#) have a more [exciting feel to them](#). "Fortune favors the brave," actor Matt Damon says in a [commercial](#) peddling an app where people can trade digital currencies such as bitcoin.

But as the Fidelity data shows, boring has worked to make a wave of workers wealthy in a far less risky way.

## Crime, Criminals

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	02/21 Colorado: fentanyl in home 5 OD deaths
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.foxnews.com/us/colorado-police-recover-fentanyl-home-five-people-fatally-overdosed-sunday-afternoon">https://www.foxnews.com/us/colorado-police-recover-fentanyl-home-five-people-fatally-overdosed-sunday-afternoon</a>
GIST	<p>Detectives with the Commerce City Police Department recovered drugs that tested positive for fentanyl from a home where five adults suffered fatal overdoses on Sunday afternoon.</p> <p>The five victims, two men and three women, ranged in age from 24 to 32. A 4-month-old baby was found at the home and was doing fine on Monday, according to police.</p> <p>Commerce City Police Chief Clint Nichols said that the baby's mother was among the deceased, KUSA reports.</p> <p>A 29-year-old woman was also found in the home and transported to a local hospital for treatment.</p> <p>Officials believe that the deceased intended to do cocaine and overdosed on fentanyl, 17th Judicial District Attorney Brian Mason said Monday.</p> <p>"No drug is safe right now," Mason said.</p> <p>The Commerce City Police Department said Monday that its detective will "vigorously pursue charges" against the dealers who supplied the drugs.</p> <p>"The use of fentanyl, intentionally or unintentionally, and the subsequent overdose deaths associated with its use has reached epic proportions in Colorado," the department said.</p> <p>Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid that is 50 times more powerful than heroin and is commonly laced with heroin, cocaine, and other drugs.</p> <p>An analysis by Families Against Fentanyl found that nearly 79,000 Americans between 18 and 45 years old died of fentanyl overdoses in 2020 and 2021, making it the leading cause of death for that age group.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	02/21 Maryland: 2 children shot while playing
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.foxnews.com/us/2-maryland-children-shot-annapolis">https://www.foxnews.com/us/2-maryland-children-shot-annapolis</a>
GIST	<p>Two <a href="#">Maryland</a> children were <a href="#">shot and wounded</a> after a suspect allegedly "emerged from the woods" and opened fire "indiscriminately" in Annapolis Monday night, the city's <a href="#">police</a> chief told local media.</p> <p>The shooting happened on the 1300 block of Tyler Avenue at around 7:11 p.m., police confirmed. Police responding to reports of shots fired arrived at the scene and found two juvenile victims.</p> <p>One child is a girl and the other a boy, ages unknown, a department spokesperson told Fox News Digital. Both were rushed to area hospitals. Additional details, including the extent of their injuries, were not immediately available.</p> <p>Annapolis Police Chief Ed Jackson told local media at a news briefing that the "very young" victims were playing outside near when the suspect opened fire, according to the Baltimore-based <a href="#">WJZ</a>.</p> <p>The gunman then left on foot "back the way they came," the chief said, according to WBAL-TV reporter Amy Lu.</p> <p>One week ago, <a href="#">FOX 5 DC reported</a> that an Annapolis man had been arrested for shooting two other children about 2.5 miles away over the weekend. He was released on personal recognizance – or without bail.</p>

	Those victims were a 10-year-old girl who had been shot in the back and a 14-year-old boy shot in the legs or feet.
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>02/22 Michigan: 5yr-old executed; 2 adults killed</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.foxnews.com/us/5-year-old-michigan-boy-dead-gunshots-face-mother-boyfriend-murdered-police">https://www.foxnews.com/us/5-year-old-michigan-boy-dead-gunshots-face-mother-boyfriend-murdered-police</a>
GIST	<p>A 5-year-old <a href="#">Michigan</a> boy found dead over the weekend had bullet holes in his face and was killed execution-style alongside his <a href="#">mother</a> and her boyfriend, officials said.</p> <p>The boy, named Caleb, was <a href="#">murdered</a> in his own home and his mother, Lashon Marshall, and her boyfriend, Aaron Benson, were also found dead in the home Sunday, <a href="#">Detroit police</a> said, Fox 29 reported. It is believed the murders occurred before Sunday, police said.</p> <p>A family member grew concerned after not hearing from them for some time and visited the home, where they found the two adult bodies and notified emergency services, according to the report. Law enforcement officers then arrived at the scene and found the boy in another room, they said.</p> <p>"What mindset can anyone be in that would <a href="#">shoot</a> a baby in the face intentionally?" asked former state representative Sherry Gay-Dagnogo, a relative of the family, Fox 29 reported. "You have to be heartless. There is one thing to even a score or have issues with an adult but a child? A child is off-limits."</p> <p>Shalesa Floyd, Caleb's paternal grandmother, similarly said she received "the most devastating news" when she learned of the death, Fox 29 <a href="#">reported</a>.</p> <p>Floyd added: "He could have grown up to be anything he wanted. He's our future, he was our future. Why would you take my grandson from me? I'm just lost, I'm devastated."</p> <p>Detroit Police are continuing to investigate the triple-murder but have not yet located a suspect.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>02/21 Renton police: man shot in the back</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.q13fox.com/news/police-man-shot-in-the-back-in-renton">https://www.q13fox.com/news/police-man-shot-in-the-back-in-renton</a>
GIST	<p>RENTON, Wash. - Renton police are investigating after a man was reportedly shot in the back.</p> <p>Officers were called to the 1400 block of Shattuck Ave. S around 12 p.m. for reports of a shooting.</p> <p>Witnesses say a green SUV and a white sedan sped off shortly after the shots were fired.</p> <p>The 38-year-old victim was taken to the hospital and is expected to survive.</p> <p>It's unknown what led up to the shooting. Police do not believe this was a random shooting.</p> <p>Police have not released any suspect information.</p> <p>The investigation is ongoing.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>02/21 Seattle police: deadly shooting Capitol Hill</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://komonews.com/news/local/man-dies-after-being-shot-several-times-in-capitol-hill-seattle-police-say">https://komonews.com/news/local/man-dies-after-being-shot-several-times-in-capitol-hill-seattle-police-say</a>
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Police were searching for clues Monday after a man was shot several times and found laying on a sidewalk in Seattle's Capitol Hill neighborhood, authorities said.</p>

	<p>Officials found the man in the 1700 block of Summit Avenue shortly before 6:30 p.m. Sunday and took him to Harborview Medical Center. He died from his injuries.</p> <p>Authorities have not publicly identified the man and a motive for the shooting was not known.</p> <p>Crime scene investigators searched the scene for evidence. It was not immediately known if the victim knew his assailant.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>02/21 Neighborhood turns to license plate camera</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://komonews.com/news/local/civil-rights-group-calls-neighborhood-license-plate-camera-invasive">https://komonews.com/news/local/civil-rights-group-calls-neighborhood-license-plate-camera-invasive</a>
GIST	<p>Some homeowners in South King County are so fed up with property crime, they are dishing out thousands of dollars to snap photos of license plates of anyone coming in and out of their neighborhood.</p> <p>More and more Washington neighborhoods are using the technology and people said it's working, but a civil rights group claims the move goes too far.</p> <p>"Came in, went upstairs, went through all her jewelry, ripped all her stuff off," said Don Bushell, Alder Meadow HOA President.</p> <p>Bushell said he started looking into extra security for his neighborhood after his home was burglarized. The Alder Meadow HOA invested in the so-called Flock camera a few years ago.</p> <p>"It is a very comforting thing to have eyes on the road looking at everybody coming in 24/7," Bushell said. "We do believe that this is a viable crime fighting and prevention tool."</p> <p>"It's nice because if something does happen, then you know you at least have access to that," said neighbor Kevin Murray.</p> <p>As Bushell showed KOMO 4, the camera snaps the license plates of anyone entering or leaving the community.</p> <p>"It's a very controversial technology," Bushell said. "Not everybody wants these cameras. They are concerned with privacy. There was a big debate before and we had a vote of all the homeowners and the vote was: go for it."</p> <p>In a state like Washington where it's illegal to track plates, this HOA has access to the license plate photos but Bushell insists only Auburn Police has the capability to run them.</p> <p>But, the ACLU of Washington in an emailed statement said, in part, it's concerned about neighborhoods "acting as surveillance partners with law enforcement," calling this data storage "invasive," and enabling law enforcement to undertake widespread, systematic surveillance.</p> <p>"The license plate information that I have is not used to track anyone," Bushell wrote in response to the ACLU's statement. "I never look at anyone's license plate unless that person has already infringed on the rights of a homeowner, via trespass, theft or otherwise, or otherwise acts suspiciously in some way. I am the only person who sees anything suspicious, and if nothing further occurs, that information never leaves my computer screen. No one's rights have been infringed."</p> <p>Bushell and others believe the camera has paid off, calling it a necessary step to help their 30-home neighborhood feel safe.</p> <p>"What else do I have other than vigilantism, which nobody wants to get involved in?" Bushell said.</p> <p>Flock Security said it has 30 customers in Washington. Most are neighborhoods in the Seattle metro.</p>

HEADLINE	<b>02/21 Seattle police: man shot downtown</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/police-investigating-downtown-seattle-shooting/PGWK3LVT4JBVLA4ATWXQAEZJY/">https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/police-investigating-downtown-seattle-shooting/PGWK3LVT4JBVLA4ATWXQAEZJY/</a>
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Police are investigating after a man was injured in a downtown Seattle shooting on Monday night.</p> <p>Officers responded around 8:30 p.m. to a gunshot near 3rd Avenue and Pine Street.</p> <p>Police found a 48-year-old man on the sidewalk in the 1500 block of 3rd Avenue with a gunshot wound to his face, according to a blotter post.</p> <p>He was transported to Harborview Medical Center in critical condition.</p> <p>Despite there being a large number of people nearby when the shooting happened, police said that few witnesses provided information about what led up to the shooting.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>02/21 KCSO: juvenile shot outside library</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/13-year-old-boy-shot-injured-in-white-center-on-sunday/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/13-year-old-boy-shot-injured-in-white-center-on-sunday/</a>
GIST	<p>A 13-year-old boy was shot in the arm outside the White Center Library on Sunday night, according to the King County Sheriff's Office.</p> <p>Sgt. Cynthia Sampson said the first 911 report of gunshots came in at 11:01 p.m., followed by multiple calls. A large crowd of people reportedly had gathered outside the library when the shots erupted.</p> <p>The crowd dispersed quickly. Shortly after, the injured 13-year-old was found within a block of where the shooting occurred, Sampson said. He was taken to Harborview Medical Center with non-life-threatening injuries.</p> <p>As of Monday afternoon, no further information was available about what led to the shooting.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>02/20 Seattle mobile police precinct Little Saigon</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/seattle/seattles-mobile-police-precinct-little-saigon/281-b414bc3b-4382-4402-9c5f-ae763924ccf4">https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/seattle/seattles-mobile-police-precinct-little-saigon/281-b414bc3b-4382-4402-9c5f-ae763924ccf4</a>
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Two days after Seattle police <a href="#">set up a mobile police precinct</a> in a trouble spot near 12th Avenue South and South Jackson Street in Little Saigon, neighbors say they see a noticeable difference.</p> <p>Some businesses have already closed. But community members hope it's a step in the right direction.</p> <p>You can't miss the police presence. On Sunday, flashing lights of the mobile precinct van could be seen on one side of the street, while officers patrolled the other side. A police SUV was tucked into a different strip mall across the street.</p> <p>Typically, people would be concerned to see so many officers, but there's been too much of something else around here in recent years.</p> <p>"I like it, I feel safe," Thu Van Nguyen said. "Look at this sidewalk, they're all clean."</p> <p>Nguyen said she hasn't enjoyed a walk to a neighborhood restaurant in years.</p>

	<p>"This is where I live, where I shop, and for the last two years I was so afraid," Nguyen said.</p> <p>Business owners have seen the issues firsthand - drug use, violence, homelessness.</p> <p>"I feel for a large degree the system has failed this community for a long time," Linh Thai said.</p> <p>Thai is with the community group <a href="#">Friends of Little Saigon</a>, which is working toward a long-term solution to the current issues, even after police disband the mobile unit.</p> <p>"What requires a more permanent solution is a sustainable strategy. Multi-prong strategies. Agencies from various levels of jurisdiction talking and working with each other to provide a strategy that works for most," Thai said.</p> <p>There's no doubt after a weekend with the mobile precinct, things are different.</p> <p>Seattle police haven't put a departure date on their mobile precinct. They will stay as long as resources allow.</p> <p>Business owners and residents hope there's no going back.</p> <p>The neighborhood is organizing a monthly community cleanup. The first is scheduled for March 5.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>02/20 Catalytic converter thieves cash in; low risk</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/low-risk-high-reward-catalytic-converter-thieves-are-cashing-in-and-causing-financial-pain-for-car-owners/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/low-risk-high-reward-catalytic-converter-thieves-are-cashing-in-and-causing-financial-pain-for-car-owners/</a>
GIST	<p>The red notebook Cindy Stevenson found on the floorboard of her totaled 1999 Ford F-250 was part diary, part to-do list, presumably penned by an accused car thief who detailed his “master plan” to make \$100,000 by stealing and selling catalytic converters.</p> <p>Stevenson’s pickup was stolen from the parking lot of her SeaTac condo building in early December. Normandy Park police arrested the suspected thief 12 days later after he crashed the Ford into another vehicle. Officers found a catalytic converter, cut from the undercarriage of an SUV in Burien, on the pickup’s front passenger seat.</p> <p>Stevenson, an Alaska Airlines pilot, found the notebook when she went to an impound yard to inspect the damage to her truck. She photographed the notebook’s pages — which included payouts the author received for stolen catalytic converters and lists of vehicles and parking lots to target — before turning it in to police.</p> <p>“It’s definitely becoming more and more prevalent,” Normandy Park Police Chief Dan Yourkoski said of catalytic converter thefts.</p> <p>He’s seen reports of thieves brazenly hitting vehicles parked at shopping centers during the day and in private driveways in the middle of the night. In some cases, he said, catalytic converters are being cut from stolen vehicles before they’re abandoned.</p> <p>Though there aren’t any statewide stats on the numbers of stolen catalytic converters — or “cats,” as they’re commonly known — recent tallies from the King County Sheriff’s Office illustrate the surge that’s prompted lawmakers to consider <a href="#">legislation</a> aimed at curbing thefts and figuring out where the stolen parts are ending up.</p> <p>In 2019, the Sheriff’s Office received 11 reports of catalytic converter thefts. That number jumped to 285 in 2020, before skyrocketing five-fold to 1,425 last year.</p>



The dual prospect of low risk and high reward seems to be driving the spike in [catalytic converter thefts](#) in King County and elsewhere, aided by pandemic-era restrictions on jail bookings for some people arrested for committing property crimes, say law enforcement officials. Vehicle thefts are on the rise again, too, an increase police say is likely linked to the skyrocketing thefts of catalytic converters.

At a time when police are increasingly focusing stretched resources on [investigating violent crime](#), police say reforms that [went into effect in July](#) are also having unintended consequences: Officers can no longer use force to stop someone from walking away during questioning if they haven't established probable cause that a crime has been committed and they can't pursue vehicles — even stolen vehicles — unless there is a public safety threat or they have probable cause for certain violent crimes and sex offenses.

“What we're hearing is increasing frequency of persons not stopping for traffic stops and acknowledging to law enforcement and to others that the word is out, that you don't have to stop for law enforcement if they try to pull you over,” said Steve Strachan, executive director of the Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs (WASPC).

He thinks that attitude change is behind the rise in stolen vehicles across the state. In November, 3,356 vehicles were reported stolen, a 52% increase over the 2,200 vehicles that were reported stolen in July, when the new laws went into effect, Strachan said.

All told, 12,599 vehicles were reported stolen in King County last year, accounting for 40% of the statewide total of a little over 31,000 vehicles — the kind of numbers not seen since auto thefts in the state hit peak rates between 2002 and 2007, according to data provided by WASPC.

Though the nexus between stolen cars and catalytic converters isn't always clear cut, there's anecdotal evidence indicating a link, said State Patrol Capt. Neil Weaver.

“Generally, people who are going out and committing crimes, if they do it in their own vehicles, they'll get caught faster” because witnesses or surveillance cameras are likely to spot or capture license plate numbers that help people identify suspects, he said. “So if someone is going to steal a bunch of catalytic converters, the first thing they're going to do is steal a vehicle.”

### **More valuable than gold**

Dirty, super-heated air from a car's engine passes through the honey-comb chambers of a catalytic converter before entering the muffler and exiting through the tail pipe. Coated in a ceramic or aluminum oxide wash that contains precious metals — namely platinum, palladium and rhodium — the metals act as catalysts and convert harmful carbon monoxide and nitrogen oxide into water vapor, carbon dioxide and nitrogen.

It's possible to drive a car without a catalytic converter but it isn't advisable or legal, said Seattle mechanic Christopher Goodwin. Without one, exhaust is pumped out beneath the car instead of through the muffler and tailpipe — the noise alone is enough to make your ears ring but could also start a fire, possibly lead to carbon-monoxide poisoning or cause additional damage, he said. In some models, Goodwin said the car's computer will detect a problem and put the vehicle in “limp mode,” making it impossible to drive at full speed.

A catalytic converter stolen from some hybrid models can sell online for as much as \$1,500 because it contains a larger amount of rhodium, which is resistant to corrosion and currently sells for more than \$15,000 an ounce. That makes it eight times more valuable than gold, according to prices listed on KITCO.com, a leading online retailer of precious metals. As of Tuesday, KITCO.com priced platinum at \$1,024 an ounce, and palladium, at \$2,190 an ounce.

Thieves, on average, can earn \$200 per catalytic converter — about 1/10th of what it costs to replace a stolen one. And thefts happen quickly, usually taking only a minute or two. Unless a thief is caught in the act, it's nearly impossible for police to prove a catalytic converter is stolen because the parts don't come with any identifying markers.

Though one suggested fix is for car owners to have their vehicle-identification numbers etched onto their catalytic converters, scrap-metal recyclers say that may do more harm than good, enabling thieves to access personal information about a vehicle's owner, said Des Moines Mayor Matt Mahoney.

Mahoney was among those who testified earlier this year in support of [HB 1815](#), which would require a Joint Transportation Committee work group to make recommendations to reduce catalytic converter thefts, require WASPC to establish a police training program (once it's funded) to target metal thefts, and require scrap-metal dealers to document that any catalytic converters they purchase came from a vehicle registered to the seller. (Scrap-metal businesses are already subject to statutory requirements related to record-keeping, restricting certain transactions and an obligation to aid police in preserving evidence of stolen property.)

"We need federal legislation on re-sellers," since online sites like craigslist, OfferUp and EBay and out-of-state buyers aren't required to follow the same regulations as Washington's scrap-metal dealers, he said. "Fencing stuff has been made easier and there's no ramifications."

Des Moines, a 7-square mile city in South King County with a population of about 30,000, saw 12 catalytic converter thefts reported to police in 2020, Mahoney said. Eighty-two thefts were reported to police last year through October, though Mahoney suspects the number is much higher with far more thefts going unreported.

#### **"I couldn't believe my eyes"**

Stevenson, the Alaska Airlines pilot, lives in Yakima but also owns a small condo in SeaTac, a half-mile from the airport. She drove her husband's 23-year-old pickup across Snoqualmie Pass on Dec. 9, arriving at her condo that afternoon before an early-morning flight the next day.

"At 9 p.m., I looked out the window and the truck was gone. I couldn't believe my eyes," said Stevenson, who reported the theft to SeaTac police.

Early on Dec. 21, two Normandy Park police officers responded to a report of a suspicious vehicle blocking a driveway, which turned out to be Stevenson's pickup, according to charges filed against Scott Sipaseuth, 30, of Tukwila. The driver ignored the officers' commands to exit the vehicle, lit a cigarette and drove directly at one of the officers, who had to jump out of the way to avoid being hit, the charges say.

The driver fled in the pickup, damaging a patrol car and then driving into oncoming traffic at high speed before running a red light and crashing broadside into another car, the charges say.

The notebook Stevenson later found on her floorboard prompted her to join the Facebook group [PNW Stolen Cars](#), where people post information and photos about their stolen vehicles and pass along tips to one other when a suspected stolen vehicle is spotted.

"I always thought vehicle thefts were random, but they're not," said Stevenson, who shared photos she took of the notebook with The Seattle Times.

"BLADES" is written across the top of the notebook's first page, followed by an entry indicating the author's preference for Diablo brand, medium and thin metal saw blades. Replete with spelling errors, profanity and capitalized words, subsequent pages include payouts the author received for catalytic converters and lists parking lots and vehicles to target:

"CRAWL UNDER THE FENCE BEHIND THE TRANSIT CENTER ON RAINIER. THE LOT IS FULL OF VEHICLES THIS TIME!" reads one entry. "TRANSIT CENTER LOT — THAT SHOULD BE ABLE TO FULLFIL (sic) MY GOAL FOR TONIGHT!"

A white van seen at a church, an SUV parked near a gas station on South Orcas Street, and trucks and work vans spotted in Tukwila's Southcenter neighborhood were among the vehicles apparently on the author's radar.

With only liability insurance on the pickup, Stevenson said the theft cost her \$50,000 — the pickup was valued at \$20,000 and she spent \$30,000 on a replacement vehicle. But the emotional expense was worse. "It's the memories. It was my husband's first truck before we got married," and he had just installed a new stereo as an anniversary present to her, Stevenson said.

#### **"It sounds like a jet engine"**

Catalytic converter thieves have hit Troy Bucy's fleet of vans and box trucks so many times in the past three years that he now budgets \$20,000 to \$30,000 each year for replacement parts.

Bucy is the owner of Pacific Modular, a commercial flooring company in Renton. His is one of 30 or so businesses located at the Oakesdale Commerce Center, a 20-acre industrial park.

Pacific Modular's crews typically work at night, said Bucy. But that hasn't stopped thieves from stealing catalytic converters from the 16 vans and box trucks in the company's fleet during the day or on weekends. Though Bucy parks some of his vehicles in a warehouse, there isn't room for all of them.

Bucy estimates he's had at least 30 catalytic converters stolen in the past three years and said many of his neighbors have been hit too. He spent \$3,000 to replace two catalytic converters taken off one truck in December.

"It's super scary — you turn on your vehicle and it sounds like a jet engine taking off," Bucy said. "My guys are so used to it now."

But it's not just about the hard costs of replacing the stolen parts and paying his mechanic to install them, he said. With supply-chain issues, there are also soft costs to consider, since a single truck can be down for two or three weeks if a catalytic converter can't be sourced right away.

"Because of thefts in the area, we don't lock any of our vehicles because they'll just break the windows if they're stealing more than catalytic converters. It's a mess. You feel helpless and that there's nothing anybody can do," Bucy said. "I get angry but that doesn't do any good. We figure it's the cost of doing business."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	<b>02/20 Guns in self-defense thwart crimes data</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.foxnews.com/us/americans-guns-self-defense-thwart-crimes-data">https://www.foxnews.com/us/americans-guns-self-defense-thwart-crimes-data</a>
GIST	<p>Americans across the country have used <a href="#">legal guns to defend themselves</a> and thwart crimes, but the reports often fly under the radar and most people are unaware how often guns are used in self-defense cases.</p> <p>"Having a gun is by far the safest course of action when people are facing a criminal by themselves," Dr. John Lott, an economist and president of the <a href="#">Crime Prevention Research Center</a>, told Fox News Digital. He pointed to women in particular, who "behave passively" and are "about 2.4 times more likely to end up being seriously injured than a woman who has a gun to protect herself."</p> <p>As crimes skyrocketed in major cities since 2020, instances of women using guns to protect themselves and stop crimes have repeatedly played out.</p> <p>"Thank God I had my gun, or I'd probably be dead right now," a <a href="#">Chicago woman with a concealed carry permit</a> said in October after two would-be carjackers approached her outside a bank.</p>

In New Orleans just last week, a mom and Air Force veteran pulled a gun on a man who tried to get into her car while she was sitting in [gridlocked traffic with her 2-year-old son](#). She wasn't forced to fire the weapon and the suspect took off.

#### **'Dramatic undercount'**

Lott said that, in a typical year, the media reports about 2,000 defensive gun use stories, but he added "that is a dramatic undercount, because the vast majority of successful self-defense cases don't make the news."

Lott said there are about 2 million defensive gun uses per year, according to the average of 18 national surveys.

The Heritage Foundation, [which launched a database tracking](#) how often guns are used in self-defense cases, cites the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention which looked at various studies and found "that Americans use their firearms defensively between 500,000 and 3 million times each year."

"The reality is, I think this number shocks a lot of people," Amy Swearer, a legal fellow in the Meese Center for Legal and Judicial Studies at the Heritage Foundation, told Fox News Digital in a phone interview.

Swearer noted that even "two outlier studies" that found fewer instances of guns being used in self-defense, they still reported guns being used "tens of thousands times every year."

Lott said that people using guns in self-defense overwhelmingly don't even lead to a criminal being killed or wounded.

"Ninety-five percent of defensive gun uses involve merely brandishing a gun, and less than 1% involve the attacker being killed or wounded. But most news stories only report on cases where attackers are killed and brandishings are ignored. It is understandable that someone getting killed is more newsworthy than a woman brandishing a gun and the criminal running away without committing a crime, but from a policy perspective we care about both cases," he said.

Homicide rates broke records in at least 16 major cities last year, while parts of California were plagued by smash-and-grab robberies, and cities such as [Philadelphia](#) and [Chicago](#) saw staggering spikes in carjackings.

With the spike in crimes came fears from city residents that they needed to protect themselves.

In Beverly Hills, California, for example, a gun store owner told Fox News Digital earlier this year that sales recently spiked for him as residents look for a last-ditch effort for protection even though the city has a long record of supporting liberal policies and gun control.

#### **Concealed permit surge**

It's a trend that has washed across the nation since 2020. The number of concealed handgun permits surged to 21.52 million in 2020, a 48% increase since 2016 and a 10.5% increase from the same time last year, according to a [study conducted by the Crime Prevention Research Center](#) released in October.

Lott said that last year, "women made up 28.3% of permit holders in the 14 states that provide data by gender." While permitted concealed carry among Black Americans grew 135.7% faster than their White counterparts.

"The people who benefit the most from owning guns are also the ones who are the most likely victims of violent crime — poor Blacks who live in high crime urban areas," according to Lott.

Political activist Maj Toure has made similar comments, saying in 2020 that he believes "[more Black people would be alive if they were armed](#)."

"So when I hear 'unarmed Black man,' I'm sad," he told Business Insider Weekly, "because there should be no such thing."

But activists, researchers and Democratic leaders argue that with more guns comes more crime.

Researchers from Boston University examined all 50 states between 1981 and 2010 and found a ["robust correlation"](#) between gun ownership and gun homicides.

"This research is the strongest to date to document that states with higher levels of gun ownership have disproportionately large numbers of deaths from firearm-related homicides," Boston University professor of community health sciences Michael Siegel said of the research back in 2013.

Meanwhile, gun control groups such as the Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence argue that "permissive concealed carry permitting laws are linked to 8.6% higher firearm homicide rate, and 13-15% higher violent crime [rates compared to 'May Issue' states](#)."

#### **'Enough is enough'**

President Biden met with New York City Mayor Eric Adams earlier this month and rolled out a plan to stop the flow of guns in the city, bolster [law enforcement](#) and increase funding for community policing. A part of the plan also included the [Justice Department](#) issuing directives to every U.S. attorney's office nationwide to "increase resources dedicated to district-specific violent crime strategies."

"Every day in this country, 316 people are shot, 106 are killed. And six NYPD officers have been victims of gun violence so far, just this year — the same in the town north of me, Philadelphia; and my much smaller town of Wilmington, Delaware; and Washington, D.C.," [Biden said in New York on Feb. 3](#).

"It's enough. Enough is enough," he continued.

To Lott, what most people miss amid the emphasis on gun crimes is that "over 92% of violent crime has nothing to do with guns."

"The data shows that while violent crime reported to police rose 5% between 2019 and 2020, you can't blame that increase on guns because gun crimes actually fell by 27%," he said.

"The bottom line is that if you want to reduce gun crime, you do the same things that you do to reduce violent crime generally, and that is make it riskier for criminals to commit crime."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	<b>02/19 Epstein pal found hanged in prison cell</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/feb/19/jean-luc-brunel-held-on-suspicion-of-supplying-girls-to-epstein-found-hanged">https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/feb/19/jean-luc-brunel-held-on-suspicion-of-supplying-girls-to-epstein-found-hanged</a>
GIST	<p>The former boss of a French model agency accused of rape and under investigation on suspicion of supplying underage girls to the late American financier <a href="#">Jeffrey Epstein</a> has been found dead in prison.</p> <p>The body of Jean-Luc Brunel, 75, was reportedly found hanging in his cell in the early hours of Saturday. The French prosecutors' office confirmed the report and said an inquiry had been opened into the exact cause of death, but early indications pointed to suicide.</p> <p>Brunel was <a href="#">arrested in December 2020</a> at Charles de Gaulle airport before boarding a plane for Dakar in Senegal where he told police he was going on holiday.</p> <p>He was officially put under investigation on allegations of the alleged rape of a minor and sexual harassment shortly after his arrest, and was put under a second investigation for the rape of a minor in June last year.</p> <p>Investigators had also questioned Brunel on suspicion of the human trafficking of underage girls for sexual exploitation. He was being held on remand in La Santé prison in Paris.</p>

Several top models had come forward to [accuse him of sexual assault](#) and [rape](#), and French police had reportedly interviewed hundreds of potential witnesses. Brunel had denied any wrongdoing or any involvement in illegal activities. He disappeared from public life shortly after Epstein's death in August 2019. Epstein also hanged himself in his prison cell while awaiting trial.

In the 1990s, Paris-born Brunel was a model talent scout and boss of the prestigious agency Karin Models. After he was banned from the agency in European 1999 following a BBC undercover report on abuse in the fashion industry, he moved to the US and founded MC2 Model Management with funding from Epstein. He is credited with discovering a number of supermodels including Christy Turlington and Milla Jovovich.

He met Ghislaine Maxwell, Epstein's partner, in the 1980s and she had introduced him to Epstein.

Brunel had been released on bail last November but had been ordered to return to prison after a few days to await trial.

His legal team said in a statement: "His distress was that of a man of 75 years old caught up in a media-legal system that we should be questioning. Jean-Luc Brunel never stopped claiming his innocence and had made many efforts to prove it. His decision [to end his life] was not driven by guilt but by a deep sense of injustice."

In 2015, Virginia Roberts Giuffre, who recently [accepted an undisclosed sum](#) from Prince Andrew – another Epstein friend – after bringing a civil case against the royal, accused Brunel of supplying girls to Epstein. She said the American financier had bragged to her that he had slept with more than 1,000 "of Brunel's girls".

Giuffre, who was abused by Epstein, had claimed she had sex with Prince Andrew on three occasions, the first of which when she was 17 years old. The prince had denied her claims.

Maxwell, 59, is currently in prison in the US, having been convicted of sex trafficking.

French prosecutors said Brunel's death would put an end to the legal case unless other suspects were put under investigation.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	<b>02/18 Extremist infiltration of military a problem?</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.vice.com/en/article/akv4qp/oath-keepers-us-capitol-stewart-rhodes-far-right-military">https://www.vice.com/en/article/akv4qp/oath-keepers-us-capitol-stewart-rhodes-far-right-military</a>
GIST	<p>For years, experts have warned about the threat posed by right-wing extremism within military and police forces around the world. The <a href="#">Capitol riot</a> in January last year showed just how right they were.</p> <p>An outsized role was allegedly played that day by a group called <a href="#">the Oath Keepers</a>, a far-right anti-government militia, whose membership is drawn heavily from the ranks of serving and former military and police. During the riot, the group, which had already carved out an intimidating reputation for showing up, heavily armed, at protests across the US, could be seen moving swiftly through the crowds in a formation drilled in military training.</p> <p>Prosecutors say the group was there that day with a clear purpose: to stop the lawful transfer of presidential power and keep Donald Trump in office.</p> <p>They've charged Oath Keepers founder Stewart Rhodes, a former Army paratrooper who was arrested in January alongside other members of his group, with seditious conspiracy.</p> <p>"Rhodes spearheaded a conspiracy to oppose by force the execution of the laws governing the transfer of presidential power in the United States," prosecutors <a href="#">wrote</a>. "Rhodes stood at the cent[re] of the seditious</p>



conspiracy – orchestrating plans to use force, recruiting and financing co-conspirators, purchasing weaponry and tactical gear, inciting support and action, and endeavoring to conceal his and other co-conspirators' crimes."

They say Rhodes had helped organise so-called "quick reaction forces" to be in the area on the 6th of January, and had written in a group chat with his co-conspirators that the day of the riots could be the "final nail" in the US's coffin.

Trump "must know that if he fails to act, we will. He has to understand that we will have no choice," wrote Rhodes, according to an [NBC News report](#) citing the US government.

Experts say the alleged heavy involvement of the Oath Keepers in the Capitol riot highlights the urgency of tackling the problem of extremism in the security and defence forces.

At least 80 military members are revealed to have signed up for the Oath Keepers while still serving in the US military – with more than a dozen even signing up using their official military email addresses, according [to reports](#). That's on top of the dozens of current and former police officers confirmed to have joined the group.

The risks of this are obvious. As serving military or police officers, individuals swear an oath to defend the country and follow orders, and are given specialist tactical training, and access to high-tech weaponry in response.

Their membership of anti-government groups like the Oath Keepers, which are steeped in conspiracy theories about elites coordinating to oppress the people, run in direct conflict with that, raising the risk that those assets will be brought to bear against the government these soldiers have sworn to serve.

"It undermines the legitimacy of both the military and law enforcement," said Peter Simi, an associate professor at Chapman University who studies extremist groups and violence.

"It's hard to say you have a democratic institution when you have ... active members of the far-right who are interested in undermining the government, or essentially advocating for various kinds of vigilante violence."

The Oath Keepers, in particular, are known for pushing far-right conspiracies about an impending totalitarian New World Order, with Rhodes repeatedly claiming that the US was descending into civil war and advising his followers to arm themselves.

"They will talk about things ... like the United Nations being a vehicle for tyranny that is orchestrated by some murky cabal of international elites," said Sam Jackson, an assistant professor at the University of Albany.

"Oath Keepers doesn't depict politics as a way for us to come together to solve common problems. Instead, it's a place driven by this fight between good and evil."

And it's not just an American phenomenon. In recent years, a string of high-profile cases have emerged of extremists within Western military forces. In 2018, a British soldier was [jailed for being a member](#) of a neo-Nazi terrorist group. Last year, a Belgian soldier [went on the run](#), armed with stolen rocket launchers and guns, vowing to attack leading virologists in response to COVID restrictions. And Germany's military has been [plagued](#) by a [string of far-right scandals](#).

Experts say problem has been driven by a number of factors: far-right groups deliberately targeting the forces for recruitment; a macho, hierarchical and authoritarian mindset in the services that is perhaps more susceptible to far-right ideology; and a lack of adequate response from the authorities so far to the threat of far-right infiltration.



	<p>These latest incidents only underline that it's long overdue to take the problem more seriously, say experts.</p> <p>"In the case of law enforcement ... they are the ultimate authority to take another person's life. If they deem it's necessary, they carry a badge that gives them that [power]," said Simi.</p> <p>"The question is: do you want a person in that position of authority, with that level of power... who subscribes to neo-Nazi or other far right extremist beliefs?"</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>02/18 RCMP: mob wrecks remote BC pipeline site</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.vice.com/en/article/xqd5pz/coastal-gaslink-attack-axe-mob">https://www.vice.com/en/article/xqd5pz/coastal-gaslink-attack-axe-mob</a>
GIST	<p>RCMP say they're investigating after about 20 masked people—some carrying axes—attacked a Coastal GasLink pipeline construction site in northern British Columbia, causing millions of dollars worth of damage by destroying heavy machinery, fencing, and portable buildings.</p> <p>Some allegedly tried to light a car on fire while workers were sitting in it, according to Coastal GasLink.</p> <p>RCMP haven't announced any arrests, and it's unclear how 20 people were able to get to and from the remote site without arrest.</p> <p>Officers were called in by Coastal GasLink security just after midnight on Thursday after suspects allegedly attacked security guards and smashed their car windows, <a href="#">an RCMP statement says</a>.</p> <p>RCMP officers encountered downed trees, wires, boards with spikes, tar-covered stumps, and fires scattered along 60 kilometres of the roadway leading up to the site. People allegedly threw smoke bombs and burning sticks as police made their way through the mess, an RCMP statement says. One officer was injured.</p> <p>When officers finally arrived at the worksite, they found significant damage: heavy machinery, fencing, and portable buildings were destroyed. Images show massive construction machinery toppled on its side and other construction vehicles with their windows smashed.</p> <p>"This was a calculated and organized violent attack that left its victims shaken and a multimillion-dollar path of destruction," said RCMP Chief Superintendent Warren Brown.</p> <p>According to <a href="#">a statement</a> by Coastal GasLink, no workers were harmed during the incident but some were "shaken."</p> <p>"An attempt was made to set a vehicle on fire while workers were inside. The attackers also wielded axes, swinging them at vehicles and through a truck's window. Flare guns were also fired at workers," the statement says. "Workers fled the site for their own safety and remain shaken by this violent incident."</p> <p>Suspects allegedly used grinders to cut locks. They also cut fuel and hydraulic lines, causing leaks.</p> <p>Some people living nearby have voiced skepticism about the RCMP statement on social media.</p> <p>The incident took place at a CGL pipeline site near Houston, B.C.—the same spot where Wet'suwet'en land defenders set up a blockade and opposition camp late last year. It lasted about two months before an RCMP raid shut it down, and resulted in <a href="#">two journalists being arrested</a>.</p> <p>Wet'suwet'en elected officials have approved the pipeline project, but hereditary chiefs, viewed by many as the rightful leaders, haven't. For years, Wet'suwet'en land defenders have blocked pipeline construction on and off, and have faced multiple police raids, many violent.</p> <p>In early 2020, supporters blocked critical infrastructure across Canada in a national display of solidarity.</p>

HEADLINE	<b>02/18 Ecuador's drug violence soars</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.vice.com/en/article/v7dpnb/ecuador-drug-war-bodies-hanged-bridge">https://www.vice.com/en/article/v7dpnb/ecuador-drug-war-bodies-hanged-bridge</a>
GIST	<p>The discovery this week of two bodies hanging from a bridge in Ecuador marks an escalation in an increasingly bloody and aggressive drug war that has plunged the country into crisis.</p> <p>The bodies were found on Feb. 14 hanging from a pedestrian bridge over a major road in a neighborhood outside Guayaquil, a port city that is an epicenter of Ecuador's violence. Deputy Police Commander Marcelo Cortez said in a <a href="#">news conference</a> that he didn't know how the bodies got there, but said that family members reported that the victims had gone missing three days earlier. Cortez said the police had opened an investigation into whether the murders were connected to the seizure in Guayaquil a day earlier of <a href="#">seven tons of cocaine</a> from a shipment of bananas bound for Belgium.</p> <p>Ecuador is a prominent drug trans-shipment point because it borders coca-producing countries Colombia and Peru. Authorities have said <a href="#">criminal gangs with ties to Mexican drug cartels</a> have also started operating in the country, possibly fueling the escalation in violence. By hanging bodies from a bridge, the criminals were mimicking one of the bloodiest tactics of Mexico's drug war, intended to intimidate rivals.</p> <p>Durán, the suburb outside Guayaquil where the bodies were found, has been plagued by violence, rattled by shootings in broad daylight and the discovery of at least <a href="#">five decapitated heads</a> since November, according to El Universo newspaper.</p> <p>Ecuador saw enormous gang violence during the first decade of the 2000s. In 2007, the country took a novel approach by trying <a href="#">to legitimize gangs</a> and incorporate them into civic life rather than targeting their members as criminals. The government allowed gangs to register as cultural groups, which in turn gave them a chance to receive government funding for education and community projects. Over the next decade, murder rates plummeted.</p> <p>But murders began climbing again in 2016 and skyrocketed last year.</p> <p>Nora Brito, a fellow with the International Crisis Group in Ecuador investigating security issues, said the rising violence stems from a combination of factors. Colombia, she said, is producing "incredible amounts of cocaine" which is being sent to Ecuador. Because Ecuador closed its ports for long periods during the pandemic, the drugs had nowhere to go. They are finally being shipped, heightening the violence.</p> <p>"There is so much more that needs to be exported, and the drug cartels are fighting for control," Brito said. "Where to send them, what routes, how to do it."</p> <p>Finally, Brito said, the consequences of austerity measures enacted under Ecuador's previous president, including fewer rehabilitation programs inside prisons, are being felt now.</p> <p>The number of murders in Ecuador rose more than 80 percent last year, to 2,494, up from 1,371 in 2020, according to statistics from the Government Ministry. Part of the spike reflects an <a href="#">epidemic of violence in the country's prisons</a> that killed more than 300 inmates. In November, a massacre in Litoral Penitentiary, an overcrowded and gang-controlled prison in Guayaquil, killed 68 inmates. In September, <a href="#">more than 100 people</a> died in the same prison following a bloody riot.</p> <p>Ecuador's president, Guillermo Lasso, a conservative who took office in May, <a href="#">declared a state of emergency</a> in October and ordered troops onto the streets to address the violence. Under the executive order, authorities were given the power to restrict freedom of movement and gatherings.</p> <p>According to Insight Crime, <a href="#">rival gangs</a> seeking control over the drug trade have fueled the violence in Guayaquil. The Chone Killers gang, led by Benjamín Camacho, known as "Ben 10," were an armed wing of the Choneros gang until they turned on the group in 2021.</p>

HEADLINE	<b>02/19 Renton police investigate shots fired at park</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://komonews.com/news/local/nearly-two-dozen-shots-fired-in-renton-no-injuries-reported">https://komonews.com/news/local/nearly-two-dozen-shots-fired-in-renton-no-injuries-reported</a>
GIST	<p>RENTON, Wash. - Renton Police are investigating after nearly two dozen shots were fired near Heritage Park in Renton.</p> <p>Police say they received reports of more than 20 shots being fired in the area of NE 4th St and Union Ave NE around 4 a.m. Saturday. Several people also reported damage to apartments, windows, and cars in the area. Police say bullet holes were found in apartments but luckily, no one was injured.</p> <p>Police responded to the scene but were unable to find any suspects. However, two firearms were found in the area and one was reported stolen in 2021.</p> <p>Police say several witnesses in the area were able to provide video footage of the incident.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>02/19 Portland shooting: 1 killed, 5 wounded</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/feb/20/portland-shooting-protest">https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/feb/20/portland-shooting-protest</a>
GIST	<p>One person was killed and five were wounded in a shooting at a park in <a href="#">Portland</a>, authorities said.</p> <p>The Portland police bureau said officers responded to a report of shots fired at Normandale Park on Saturday at about 8pm.</p> <p>Officers found one woman dead and two men and three other women were taken to hospital, police said. Their conditions were not immediately known. Police did not immediately name anyone involved in the shooting.</p> <p>Social media flyers showed there was a planned march for Amir Locke, a Black man who was fatally shot by police in Minneapolis, the same time the shooting took place, KOIN-TV reported.</p> <p>The <a href="#">Oregon</a> medical examiner was expected to identify the woman killed and determine the cause of death. An investigation was continuing.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>02/19 Portland police: 6 shootings in 9hrs</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattlepi.com/news/article/Portland-sees-6-shooting-incidents-within-9-hours-16932250.php">https://www.seattlepi.com/news/article/Portland-sees-6-shooting-incidents-within-9-hours-16932250.php</a>
GIST	<p>PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — As gun violence plagues Portland, police in Oregon's largest city responded to six shootings within a nine hour span between Thursday night and early Friday.</p> <p>The shootings included a car chase, during which suspects shot at an officer. Three people were arrested and the officer was not injured.</p> <p>Although last year was marked by record high numbers of gun violence in Portland, the number of shooting incidents during the first month of 2022 outpaced January 2021, according to police data.</p> <p>During January alone, police recorded 127 shootings. So far this year at least 22 people have been injured by gunfire and there have been at least 13 homicides.</p> <p>In 2021, the city recorded 90 homicides amid a surge in gun violence, shattering the city's previous high of 66 set more than three decades ago.</p> <p>Last year, the number of homicides in Portland surpassed more populous cities such as San Francisco and Boston — and more than double the number of slayings in its larger Pacific Northwest neighbor Seattle.</p>

	<p>Killings have been on the rise in Portland for the past few years. From 2019 to 2020, Portland had a sharper rise in killings — an 83% increase — than nearly all major cities. Nationally, homicides had increased by nearly 30% in the same time, based on FBI data.</p> <p>City police and officials say last year's increase — which disproportionately impacted Portland's Black community — was fueled by gang-related arguments, drug deals gone awry and disputes among homeless people. The situation was exacerbated by the pandemic, economic hardships and mental health crises.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>02/19 Mexico army anti-mine squads to cartel turf</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://apnews.com/article/business-mexico-caribbean-improvised-explosives-drug-cartels-a49c12cd0539940f165659f211316c42">https://apnews.com/article/business-mexico-caribbean-improvised-explosives-drug-cartels-a49c12cd0539940f165659f211316c42</a>
GIST	<p>NARANJO DE CHILA, Mexico (AP) — Special squads of Mexican army troops equipped with metal detectors and bomb suits have deployed to the western state of Michoacan, where warring drug cartels have planted land mines or improvised explosive devices.</p> <p>The squads apparently have found dozens of such devices along rural roads and fields in the area around the township of Aguililla.</p> <p>The mines claimed their first civilian victim last week, when a farmer drove over one in his pickup truck; his son was wounded in the blast. That explosion was apparently fueled by a device containing ammonium nitrate.</p> <p>But the mines found so far have also included devices detonated by radio or telephone signal, by pressure — as when someone steps on them — or even by vials that break and combine two chemicals.</p> <p>On Friday, a soldier demonstrated how he cautiously approaches suspicious spots of disturbed soil on a dirt road in the area, before getting a signal and calling in another soldier in a bomb suit.</p> <p>Mexican army troops rolled into Aguililla, a township long dominated by the Jalisco cartel, for the first time in months on Feb. 8.</p> <p>A few days before that, an army vehicle was disabled by an improvised explosive device, or IED, planted on a road, and 10 soldiers were injured by the mine or other weapons. That was the first known successful use of IEDs against a military target in Mexico.</p> <p>The Jalisco cartel has been fighting the local Viagras gang, also known as United Cartels, for control of the area for years.</p> <p>Michoacan state is coveted by drug cartels for its seaport and smuggling routes as well as the opportunity to extort money from the state's growers of avocados and limes.</p> <p>Some say the fighting has been so fierce around the hardscrabble hamlet of Naranjo de Chila because that is the hometown of Jalisco cartel leader Nemesio "El Mencho" Oseguera.</p> <p>The cartels already have used trenches, pillboxes, homemade armored cars and drones modified to drop small bombs in their fight for control of Michoacan.</p> <p>But the primitive, buried pipe-bomb style explosives can be the most indiscriminate of weapons.</p> <p>The cartels' bomb-carrying drones have actually caused more terror in Michoacan than the land mines. While initially crude and dangerous to load and operate — and still worryingly indiscriminate — drone warfare has improved, and it's not unusual to see metal barn or shed roofs opened like tin cans from the impact of drone explosions.</p>

HEADLINE	<b>02/19 Seattle PD: 4 officers hurt; downtown fights</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://komonews.com/news/local/four-officers-injured-while-responding-to-fights-in-downtown-seattle">https://komonews.com/news/local/four-officers-injured-while-responding-to-fights-in-downtown-seattle</a>
GIST	<p>SEATTLE - Seattle Police say four officers were injured while trying to break up fights in downtown Seattle early Saturday morning.</p> <p>Police say officers on-duty saw a fight in a parking lot in the 300 block of 2nd Ave S just before 2 a.m. Officers responded and one of the involved individuals reportedly punched two of the officers in the face, according to police.</p> <p>Police used a taser to take the man into custody and officers say he allegedly kicked a third officer.</p> <p>A spokesperson with the Seattle Police Department says they took the man to King County Jail where he was declined. He is currently under guard at Harborview Medical Center.</p> <p>Just after 2 a.m., officers responded to a fight at a nightclub in Belltown. While officers were attempting to break up the fight in the parking lot, police say an individual attacked an officer from behind.</p> <p>The person was taken into custody.</p> <p>Seattle Police say all four officers suffered minor injuries.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>02/19 Chehalis: officer injured; suspect killed</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/sheriff-officer-injured-suspect-killed-in-chehalis/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/sheriff-officer-injured-suspect-killed-in-chehalis/</a>
GIST	<p>CENTRALIA, Wash. (AP) — Authorities say a man being sought by Pierce County detectives was fatally shot in Chehalis, Washington, on Friday after stabbing a police officer.</p> <p>KOMO reports detectives were in Chehalis to arrest a 32-year-old man for investigation of second-degree child rape.</p> <p>As deputies approached the residence, the Lewis County Sheriff's office says the man appeared to reach for a weapon. A Pierce County deputy fired a gun and the man ran off.</p> <p>Law enforcement responded and a K9 was able to locate the man just after 12 p.m.</p> <p>While making contact with the man, the sheriff's office says the man stabbed a Centralia Police Officer in the head and back. Officers from the Centralia Police Department then shot and killed the man, according to the sheriff's office.</p> <p>The officer who was stabbed was taken to an area hospital for surgery and is in stable condition.</p> <p>The Lewis County Sheriff's Office is the primary investigating agency however, the Chehalis Police Department, Thurston County Sheriff's Office, Mason County Sheriff's Office, and the Washington State Patrol are all assisting.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	

HEADLINE	<b>02/18 Thief must repay \$400 in record \$6M heist</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/feb/18/diamond-thief-must-pay-back-244-after-record-42m-heist">https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/feb/18/diamond-thief-must-pay-back-244-after-record-42m-heist</a>
GIST	<p>A woman who stole £4.2m worth of diamonds by swapping them for pebbles has been ordered to pay back less than £250.</p>

Lulu Lakatos, 60, is serving a five-and-a-half year jail sentence after she was found guilty of conspiracy to steal in 2021.

Southwark crown court heard she posed as “Anna”, a gem expert, in order to steal seven stones from the Mayfair jewellers Boodles, after being sent to value them on behalf of supposed wealthy buyers.

The diamonds were to be placed in a padlocked purse and held in the store’s vault until funds were transferred.

CCTV footage from the firm’s basement showed the moment the purse was put into Lakatos’s handbag and switched for a duplicate by an accomplice in 2016.

Less than three hours after the switch, Lakatos and her accomplices fled the UK for France.

When the purse in the Boodles safe was opened the following day, inside were seven small garden pebbles. The real diamonds have never been recovered.

A proceeds of crime hearing on Friday was told Romanian-born Lakatos, from Saint-Brieuc, Brittany, is expected to be extradited back to France.

Judge Alexander Milne QC said: “As far as the figures are concerned, there is a striking contrast between the benefit figure of £4,299,671 and the available assets of €293.57[£244].”

Since the money has already been seized, he set a one-day default sentence with a month to pay.

Christophe Stankovic and Mickael Jovanovic, who were involved in the plot, were jailed for three years and eight months after pleading guilty to conspiracy to steal.

Prosecutors said it was the highest-value theft of its kind ever committed in the UK.

Lakatos was wanted in Switzerland for an almost identical plot, where an envelope containing €400,000 was switched for a duplicate filled with paper.

Lakatos has three previous convictions for theft in France. She arrived in London the day before the theft and was seen on CCTV with Georgeta Danila, 53, entering the Cricklewood Lodge hotel in London, before making a reconnaissance trip to Boodles with Stankovic and Jovanovic. Danila was acquitted after telling a jury she had no idea she had been involved in the crime.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	<b>02/18 Switzerland arrests ‘finger cutter’ drug lord</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/18/finger-cutter-drug-lord-flor-bressers-arrested-in-switzerland">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/18/finger-cutter-drug-lord-flor-bressers-arrested-in-switzerland</a>
GIST	<p>One of Europe’s most-wanted drug lords, a Belgian with a master’s degree in criminology, has been arrested in <a href="#">Switzerland</a> after two years on the run.</p> <p>Flor Bressers, 35, nicknamed “the finger cutter”, has been sought since 2020 when he was given a four-year jail sentence for kidnapping, slashing with a razor and beating a Dutch florist who failed to smuggle drugs past UK customs.</p> <p>He was prosecuted previously in 2010 in Limburg for allegedly cutting off the finger of a Dutch criminal with pruning shears. He was acquitted for lack of evidence, but the alleged incident earned him his nickname.</p> <p>Bressers has been linked via numerous cases to a narcotics gang operating in Antwerp believed to have smuggled tonnes of cocaine from South America to <a href="#">Europe</a>.</p>



<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	<p>He was on both a Belgian and <a href="#">Europol most-wanted list</a> for kidnapping, illegal restraint and hostage-taking and participation in a criminal organisation.</p> <p>It was thought Bressers had been hiding in South Africa but he was arrested in Zurich where he was found with his partner and child. The Belgian authorities have requested his extradition.</p> <p>Kristof Aerts, a spokesman for prosecutors in Antwerp, said Bressers was linked to ongoing judicial investigations in Antwerp, West Flanders and East Flanders.</p> <p>He said: “Serious organised crime is the common thread here. These include investigations into the international trafficking of drugs in which the violence was committed.</p> <p>“Last night, the fugitive was arrested in Switzerland. The arrest, carried out by special units and with the help of other Swiss police forces, is the result of an intensive manhunt that lasted several months.”</p> <p>Experts have warned that the extreme violence of the drug cartels operating in Mexico and Colombia has been exported to Europe in recent years.</p> <p>Earlier this month, prosecutors in Amsterdam said recreational drug users should reflect <a href="#">on the discovery of a soundproofed torture chamber</a> in Wouwse Plantage in Brabant, in the Netherlands.</p> <p>In the shipping container, detectives had found a refashioned dentist’s chair, with straps for tying arms and legs, finger clamps, scalpels, claw hammers, pliers, loppers, pruning shears, gas burners, tie wraps and duct tape.</p>
-------------------------------	--

**Information From Online Communities and Unclassified Sources/InFOCUS is a situational awareness report published daily by the Washington State Fusion Center.**

**If you no longer wish to receive this report, please submit an email to [intake@wsfc.wa.gov](mailto:intake@wsfc.wa.gov) and enter UNSUBSCRIBE InFOCUS in the Subject line.**

**DISCLAIMER - the articles highlighted within InFOCUS is for informational purposes only and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Washington State Fusion Center, the City of Seattle, the Seattle Police Department or the Washington State Patrol and have been included only for ease of reference and academic purposes.**

**FAIR USE Notice** All rights to these copyrighted items are reserved. Articles and graphics have been placed within for educational and discussion purposes only, in compliance with 'Fair Use' criteria established in Section 107 of the Copyright Act of 1976. The principle of 'Fair Use' was established as law by Section 107 of The Copyright Act of 1976. 'Fair Use' legally eliminates the need to obtain permission or pay royalties for the use of previously copyrighted materials if the purposes of display include 'criticism, comment, news reporting, teaching, scholarship, and research.' Section 107 establishes four criteria for determining whether the use of a work in any particular case qualifies as a 'fair use'. A work used does not necessarily have to satisfy all four criteria to qualify as an instance of 'fair use'. Rather, 'fair use' is determined by the overall extent to which the cited work does or does not substantially satisfy the criteria in their totality. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes of your own that go beyond 'fair use,' you must obtain permission from the copyright owner. For more information go to: [<http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/17/107.shtml>](http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/17/107.shtml)



THIS DOCUMENT MAY CONTAIN COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL. COPYING AND DISSEMINATION IS PROHIBITED WITHOUT PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNERS.

Source: <http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/17/107.shtml>

[Return to Top](#)